Examining Worker Fatigue and Labor Shortages in the U.S. Mining Industry: Implications for Safety and Productivity

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DOI:10.56201/ijemt.v10.no11.2024.pg197.238

Abstract
Briefly summarize the paper in about 150–250 words. The abstract should introduce the U.S. mining industry, highlight evidence that round-the-clock operations, dim lighting, heavy noise and long commutes cause worker fatigue (Cunningham & Guerin, 2022), and note that fatigue is associated with increased injury risk and productivity losses (Dembe et al., 2005; Cunningham & Guerin, 2022). It should also explain that the industry's workforce is aging—baby-boom workers make up roughly one-third of the workforce and are poised to retire, leaving too few younger workers to replace them (National Research Council, 2013)—and that mining engineering programs and faculty are insufficient to meet future needs (National Research Council, 2013). Clearly state the objectives (to examine relations between extended work hours, fatigue, labor shortages, safety outcomes and productivity) and outline the methodology (mixed-methods analysis of injury records, workforce statistics and survey data). Summarize the main findings and end with key recommendations for fatigue-risk management, workforce development and policy.

Keywords: *Mining industry; fatigue; shift work; labor shortage; safety; productivity; workforce development.*

1. Introduction

Context and importance of mining. The mining sector—including coal as well as metal and non-metal mining—contributes essential raw materials to the U.S. economy and employs hundreds of thousands of workers. Mining operations often run continuously (24/7) to maximize asset utilization, which means many mines operate round-the-clock shifts. These operations rely on a skilled workforce with specialized training in areas like geology, engineering, heavy equipment operation and safety management. The demanding nature and schedule of mining make issues of worker fatigue and labor supply especially critical for this industry.

Problem statement – fatigue. Underground and surface mining environments expose workers to a variety of conditions that can induce fatigue. In underground mines, illumination is low and visual acuity is limited; miners work in dim lighting for long periods, which can disrupt normal circadian alertness. High noise levels from machinery and vehicle engines, elevated heat and humidity, and monotonous, repetitive tasks further contribute to fatigue (Cunningham & Guerin, 2022). Many miners also face long commuting distances to remote mine sites and extended shifts that challenge their ability to obtain sufficient rest. In the U.S. workforce at large, over 43% of workers are sleep-deprived, and those most at risk are people working at night or on long/irregular shifts (Cunningham & Guerin, 2022). Fatigue has measurable consequences for productivity: fatigued worker performance declines, and productivity losses due to fatigue are estimated to cost employers $1,200–$3,100 per employee annually (Cunningham & Guerin, 2022). Fatigue can be **acute** (resulting from short-term sleep loss or intense extended work) or **chronic** (resulting from sustained insufficient rest over days/weeks). Extended hours, night work, and insufficient recovery time between shifts can cause circadian rhythm disruption and cumulative sleep debt, leaving workers persistently fatigued (Dawson & McCulloch, 2005). Research shows that fatigue directly impairs reaction time, attention, and decision-making ability (Uehli *et al*., 2014). In mining, this can translate to slower responses to hazards or errors in judgment when operating equipment, heightening the risk of accidents.

Problem statement – labor shortage. The U.S. mining workforce is aging and shrinking. Approximately one-third of the current mining workforce are *baby boomers* (born 1946–1964) who are now at or nearing retirement age (National Research Council, 2013). As these experienced workers retire in large numbers—often taking decades of tacit knowledge with them—there are too few younger workers entering mining to replace them (National Research Council, 2013). Compounding the issue, enrollment in mining engineering and related programs has been declining for years, resulting in a "pipeline" that is not producing enough new graduates to sustain the industry's needs (National Research Council, 2013). The National Academies reported a long-term decline in U.S. mining and mineral engineering programs and faculty positions, leading to a *non-sustaining number of mining engineers* being trained (National Research Council, 2013). In other words, if current trends continue, the country will lack sufficient mining professionals (engineers, geologists, technicians) in coming years. Industry reports illustrate the scope of the problem: between June 2010 and June 2011, metal and coal mining employment grew by 11,000 direct jobs plus 17,000 support jobs as the sector rebounded from a downturn (National Research Council, 2013). However, projections indicated that about 50,000 additional workers would be needed by 2019 to meet demand, while roughly 78,000 existing employees would retire in that same period (National Research Council, 2013). This implies a net loss of skilled labor. Indeed, by *2029 more than half of the current mining workforce is expected to retire* (over 50% attrition) if no interventions occur (National Research Council, 2013). **Table 1** summarizes some of these workforce trends and projections. Without proactive measures, the mining sector may face severe labor shortfalls that could constrain production and safety.

Table 1. U.S. Mining Workforce Trends and Projections (Sources: National Research Council, 2013; Lind, 2012)

Metric	Value / Description
Current total mining workforce (2011)	~350,000 workers (coal, metal, non-metal, aggregates)
Baby boomers (born 1946–64) as % of workforce	~33% (approximately one-third, nearing retirement age)

Metric	Value / Description
Jobs added June 2010–June 2011	+11,000 direct mining jobs; +17,000 support sector jobs
Projected new workers needed (2010–2019)	~50,000 (to meet growth in demand)
Projected retirements (2010–2019)	~78,000 (due to aging workforce, ~21% of 2010 workforce)
Projected retirements (2010–2029)	~221,000 (cumulative, >50% of workforce will retire by 2029)
Mining engineering programs in U.S. (1982 vs ~2014)	25 programs (1982); ~14–15 programs (mid-2010s) – many closures
Annual mining engineering graduates (recent years)	Declining: e.g., ~350 graduates in 2015; <330 in 2020 (down ~40%)

The shrinking education pipeline and impending wave of retirements constitute a labor crisis for mining. Moreover, the industry has struggled to attract women and younger workers; perceptions of mining as dangerous or environmentally harmful have deterred some potential entrants (Lind, 2012). If unaddressed, these labor shortages could reduce the sector's productivity and innovation capacity. Experienced miners and engineers hold critical institutional knowledge about safe and efficient practices, so their departure without adequate replacement can negatively impact safety performance and operational productivity.

Research objectives and questions. This study aims to examine how worker fatigue and labor shortages are interrelated and how they affect safety and productivity in the U.S. mining industry. The key research questions include:

- *What are the relationships between shift length, overtime hours and worker fatigue in mining?* (e.g. Do longer shifts and more frequent night shifts correspond to higher self-reported fatigue or fatigue-related incidents?)
- *How do fatigue and labor shortages influence injury rates and near-miss incidents?* (e.g. Are mines experiencing staffing shortfalls seeing more accidents, potentially due to extended hours or less training?)
- *How does a shortage of skilled workers affect productivity metrics such as tons mined per worker-hour and equipment utilization?* (e.g. Does output per worker decline as experienced workers retire faster than new ones can be trained?)
- *What mitigation strategies are most effective in managing fatigue and addressing the talent gap?* (e.g. Would implementing fatigue risk management systems, better shift scheduling, or increased training programs reduce accidents and improve productivity? What role can technology, like automation or wearable fatigue monitors, play?)

By answering these questions, the study seeks to illuminate the mechanisms through which extended work hours and workforce demographics impact mine safety outcomes and performance.

Significance of the study. Understanding the interplay between fatigue and labor supply is vital for improving safety and maintaining productivity in mining. High injury and fatality rates have long plagued mining; addressing fatigue could significantly reduce accidents caused by slowed reaction times or cognitive errors. At the same time, without enough skilled workers, mines may either overwork the existing staff (leading to more fatigue) or operate with inexperienced replacements (potentially increasing accidents and reducing efficiency). This dual challenge requires integrated solutions. The findings of this study will inform mine managers and industry leaders on how adjusting work schedules or staffing levels can mitigate risks. It will also provide evidence to policymakers and regulators (e.g., Mine Safety and Health Administration – MSHA) on whether new guidelines or support programs are needed, such as funding for mining education or fatigue management requirements. In sum, the study will contribute knowledge to help the U.S. mining industry adapt to workforce changes while safeguarding workers' well-being and sustaining productivity.

2. Literature Review

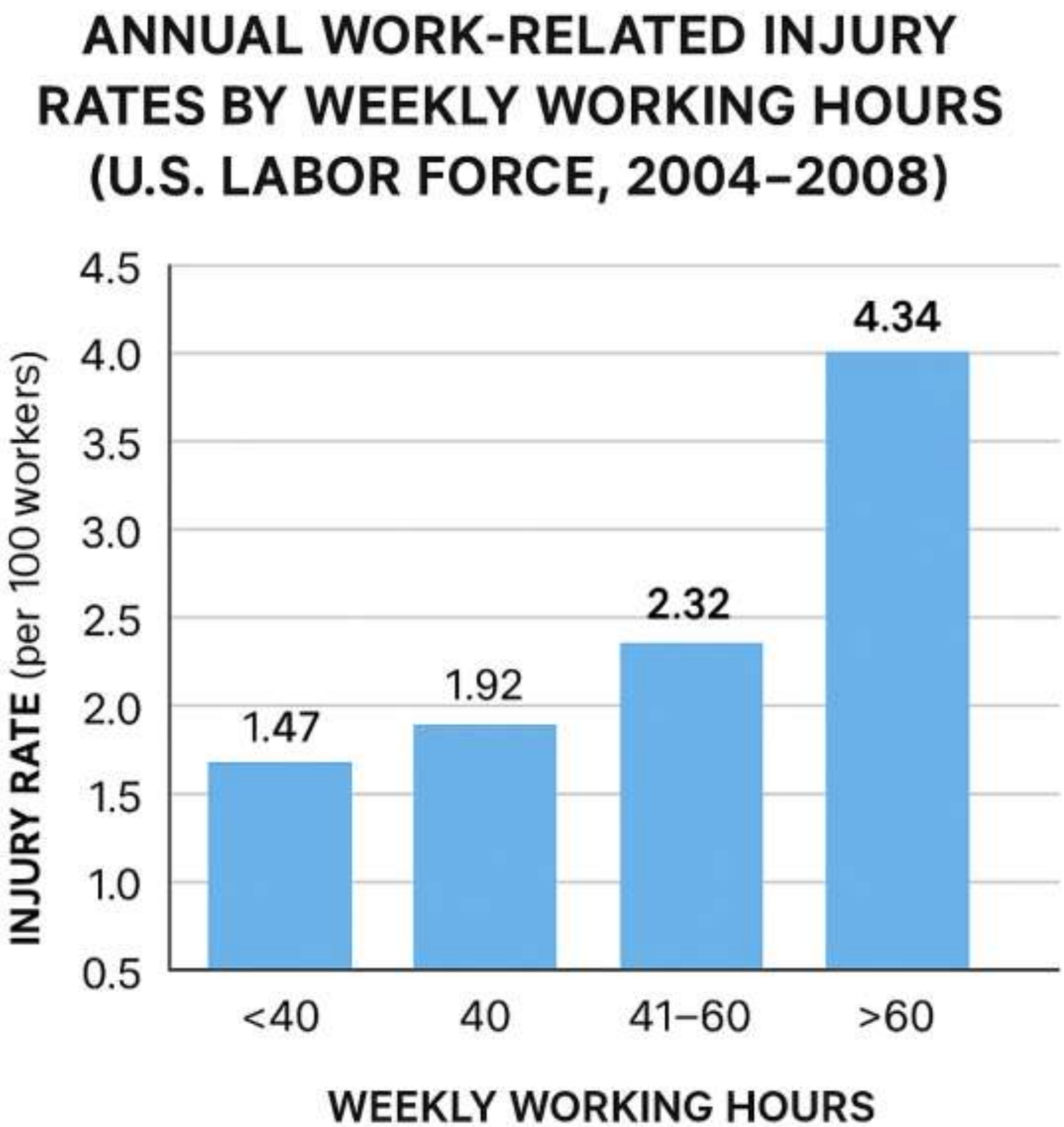
2.1 Worker fatigue in mining

Definitions and types of fatigue. Fatigue is commonly defined as a state of weariness, reduced alertness, or lack of energy that makes it difficult to perform tasks safely and effectively. In occupational contexts, researchers distinguish between *acute fatigue* and *chronic fatigue*. **Acute fatigue** refers to the short-term tiredness that follows a period of extended wakefulness or intense activity – for example, the exhaustion a miner feels at the end of a 12-hour night shift or after a single night of poor sleep. Acute fatigue can cause measurable impairments in neurocognitive functioning, such as slower reaction times, reduced vigilance, and poorer decision-making or coordination (Uehli *et al*., 2014). Laboratory studies of sleep deprivation show that even one night of missed sleep can significantly degrade reaction time and cognitive throughput (Uehli *et al*., 2014). **Chronic fatigue**, on the other hand, develops over longer periods (days, weeks, or more) due to insufficient rest and recovery on an ongoing basis. Chronic fatigue might arise in a miner who routinely works 60-hour weeks and sleeps only 5–6 hours per night, accumulating a sleep debt. This prolonged fatigue state can lead to more serious health effects: it is associated with elevated risks of cardiovascular disease, depression, and other illnesses (Cunningham & Guerin, 2022). It also contributes to burnout and persistent cognitive deficits like memory and concentration problems. In mining, both acute and chronic fatigue are relevant – a worker may experience acute fatigue during a single long shift and also suffer chronic fatigue over the course of months of intense work schedules. It is important to note that fatigue is multifactorial: inadequate sleep is a primary driver, but other factors like time of day (circadian rhythms), workload, stress, and health conditions can influence one's fatigue level (Dawson & McCulloch, 2005).

Mining-specific fatigue factors. Mining work has several characteristics that make fatigue especially pronounced. Many mines operate **shift work** schedules, including overnight shifts and rotating shifts, which disrupt workers' normal sleep patterns. Human bodies are naturally programmed (by circadian rhythm) to sleep at night; miners on night shift must be awake and vigilant when their bodies expect sleep, leading to increased fatigue and often poorer quality daytime sleep. The **environmental conditions** in mines exacerbate fatigue: underground miners labor in dimly lit tunnels with limited visual stimuli, which can induce drowsiness or "visual fatigue" as eyes strain to see in low light (Cunningham & Guerin, 2022). Noise exposure is constant from drilling, blasting, hauling and ventilation equipment; while noise can sometimes be stimulating, constant loud background noise can actually contribute to mental fatigue and difficulty concentrating. Temperatures in deep mines are often high, and humidity can be extreme, leading to dehydration and physical exhaustion. Research has noted that heat stress and physical exertion in mining can accelerate the onset of fatigue and impair cognitive function (Cunningham & Guerin, 2022). The work can also be **monotonous and repetitive** – for instance, haul truck drivers may spend 12 hours repeatedly driving back and forth on the same route. Monotonous tasks are known to increase the risk of microsleeps and lapses in attention, especially in the absence of variation or stimulation. Additionally, many U.S. mines have **long commutes** for workers (e.g., fly-in/fly-out operations or remote sites requiring bus rides of an hour or more). A miner's workday often includes these commute hours, effectively lengthening the time they are awake and reducing time at home available for sleep. Early morning shift start times (common in mining) require workers to wake pre-dawn, cutting into their natural sleep period. All these mining-specific factors tend to co-occur, compounding the fatigue problem: for example, a miner might wake at 4:00 AM, drive 1.5 hours to the site, work a 12-hour shift underground in low light and high noise, then commute home. Such a schedule, repeated several days in a row, clearly elevates fatigue risk beyond that of a typical 8-hour daytime job. It also means that fatigue countermeasures successful in other industries (like scheduled naps or frequent breaks) might be harder to implement in mines unless specifically engineered into the operation.

Consequences for safety. There is substantial evidence linking fatigue to increased risk of workplace accidents and injuries, across industries and specifically in mining. Fatigue affects the central nervous system in ways similar to alcohol intoxication; studies show that being awake for 20 hours or more can impair driving or reaction times equivalent to being over the legal alcohol limit (Dawson & McCulloch, 2005). In safety-critical environments like mines, slowed reaction or a momentary lapse can result in serious incidents (machinery collisions, falls, failure to shut down equipment, etc.). Epidemiological research supports this concern. One landmark analysis by Dembe *et al*. (2005) examined injury rates in a broad sample of U.S. workers and found a clear dose-response relationship between longer working hours and injury hazard. In jobs with overtime schedules, the injury rate was **61% higher** than in jobs without overtime; working **≥12 hours per day** was associated with about a **37% increase** in the hazard rate of injury, and working **≥60 hours per week** was associated with a **23% increase** in injury hazard (Dembe *et al*., 2005). This means that a miner working 12-hour shifts has roughly one-third higher chance of being injured than a comparable miner working 8-hour shifts, all else equal. Long hours likely contribute to acute fatigue during the latter part of shifts, when vigilance drops. Another study focused on sleep duration as a risk factor: Lombardi *et al*. (2010) analyzed U.S. National Health Interview Survey data and found that workers who slept less than 7 hours per day had significantly higher work injury rates. Those reporting **under 5 hours of sleep** had an odds ratio (OR) of **2.65** for experiencing a work injury (i.e., 165% higher odds than those sleeping ~7-8 hours), and those with **5–6 hours** sleep had an OR of **1.79** (79% higher odds) (Lombardi *et al*., 2010). In their analysis, about **13% of work injuries could be attributed to sleep problems** such as insomnia or sleep deprivation (Uehli *et al*., 2014). This suggests that a substantial fraction of mine accidents might be preventable by improving workers' sleep and alertness.

Figure 1. Annual work-related injury rates (per 100 workers) by weekly working hours category in U.S. labor force (2004–2008 data). Long work hours are associated with higher injury rates; for example, workers putting in over 60 hours per week had an injury rate of 4.34 per 100, significantly above the rate for 40-hour weeks (Lombardi *et al*., 2010). Fatigue from long hours is a likely contributor to this increased risk.



In mining specifically, recent analyses of MSHA (Mine Safety and Health Administration) injury reports have shed light on the role of long workdays. Friedman *et al*. (2019) conducted a longitudinal study of U.S. mining injuries from 1983 to 2015 and found that **9.6% of all reported injuries occurred nine or more hours into a shift**, even though most shifts are shorter than 9 hours. The proportion of injuries occurring in these long-hour scenarios increased over the decades, from about 5.5% of injuries in 1983 to 13.9% of injuries by 2015 (Friedman *et al*., 2019). In other words, as mines increasingly adopted longer shifts (10–12 hours), a growing share of injuries happened towards the end of those extended shifts. Critically, injuries that happened ≥9 hours into the work shift were more severe on average. Friedman *et al*. reported that *long-working-hour injuries were significantly more likely to result in a fatality* and more likely to involve multiple workers being injured in the same incident, compared to injuries that occurred in the first

8 hours of a shift (Friedman *et al*., 2019). After adjusting for other factors, incidents after 9+ hours had **1.32 times higher odds of being fatal** and **1.73 times higher odds of involving two or more injured workers** (Friedman *et al*., 2019). **Table 2** illustrates the distribution of mining injuries by shift length, showing the higher fatality percentage for long-shift injuries. The likely explanation is that fatigue late in a long shift contributes to catastrophic mistakes or slower emergency responses. A fatigued haul truck driver at hour 11 might nod off and crash, causing a multi-injury accident, whereas such incidents are less common earlier in the day. Additionally, long shifts may coincide with night work (some miners working 9+ hours are on evening or overnight schedules), compounding fatigue due to circadian misalignment. These findings align with international studies and other high-risk industries, all pointing to fatigue as a significant safety hazard.

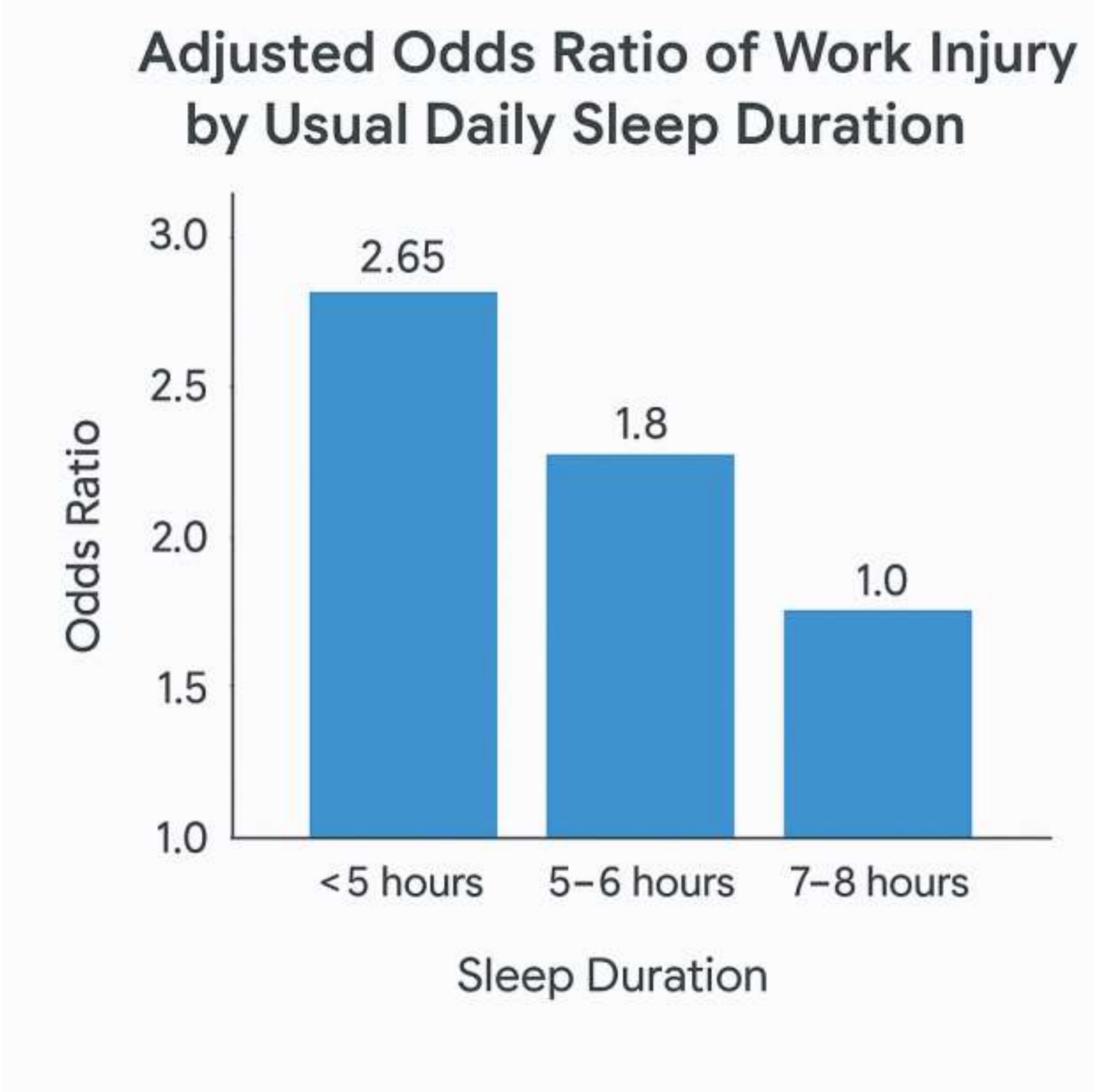
Table 2. Mining Injuries by Time into Shift (1983–2015 MSHA data) (based on Friedman *et al*., 2019)

Time of injury in shift	% of total injuries	% of injuries that were fatal
During first 8 hours of shift	90.4%	0.4% (approximate)
After 9 or more hours of shift	9.6%	0.7% (higher fatality rate)

Note: Injuries occurring after ≥9 hours on duty made up 9.6% of cases but accounted for a disproportionate share of fatalities. Long-hour injuries also had higher odds of involving multiple injured workers (Friedman *et al*., 2019). This suggests fatigue and other factors late in shifts exacerbate the severity of incidents.

Beyond acute accidents, fatigue in mining can lead to other safety issues: microsleeps or lapses can result in quality control errors (such as improper installation of roof support bolts) that create latent hazards, or near-miss events that go unreported. Fatigue also has been linked with increased rates of *human error* in following safety procedures. For example, a fatigued maintenance worker may forget to lockout a machine before repairing it. Such errors can have deadly consequences in a mining context. It is estimated that if worker fatigue could be eliminated, a significant reduction in mining injuries and fatalities would follow. One modeling study suggested that simply ensuring all workers get at least 7 hours of sleep could avert up to 20% of accidents attributable to fatigue (Uehli *et al*., 2014). While eliminating fatigue entirely is impractical, this highlights the substantial safety gains possible through better fatigue management.

Figure 2. Adjusted odds ratio of work injury by usual daily sleep duration (Lombardi *et al*., 2010). Workers who sleep 5–6 hours per day have about 1.8 times higher injury odds, and those sleeping <5 hours have 2.65 times higher odds, compared to workers who sleep ~7–8 hours (reference group, OR = 1.0). Sufficient sleep is critical for maintaining alertness; chronic short sleep greatly increases the risk of workplace accidents.



Productivity impacts. In addition to safety, fatigue can degrade productivity and operational efficiency in mines. A fatigued worker typically works more slowly and makes more mistakes in task execution. Cognitive fatigue impairs complex decision-making and problem-solving (Uehli *et al*., 2014), which in a mine might mean suboptimal decisions about equipment operation or production sequencing. Reaction time and motor skills decline, so tasks like operating a loader or drilling rig may take longer and have more pauses. Furthermore, fatigue can increase absenteeism (workers calling in sick due to exhaustion) and presenteeism (workers being present but not fully functional). According to a National Safety Council analysis, employers incur an estimated **$136 billion** annually in health-related lost productivity due to fatigue in the workforce (Cunningham & Guerin, 2022). This includes not only accidents and injuries (which cause downtime) but also routine productivity loss from slower work and errors. In mining, one significant productivity concern is equipment downtime due to operator error or mishandling. Fatigued operators may be more likely to cause unplanned shutdowns or damage. For example, if a haul truck driver is drowsy and late to apply brakes, they might cause excessive wear on the vehicle or even a minor collision that takes equipment out of service for repairs. Over time, these small productivity hits accumulate. Extended shifts are often justified economically by higher output (more hours of work per day); however, if those extended shifts come with a fatigue penalty (lower hourly productivity and higher accident downtime), the net productivity gain may be lower than expected or even negative. It has been noted anecdotally that in the last hours of a long shift, miners' effective work pace slows considerably (perhaps as much as 20–40% slower), eroding the benefit of the extra hours. Unfortunately, specific studies quantifying productivity loss in mining due to fatigue are limited – this remains a gap in the literature. Most evidence is extrapolated from other sectors or general statistics. Nonetheless, given that fatigue clearly impairs performance, it stands to reason that mining companies could improve output by managing fatigue (e.g., through better shift design or rest breaks). One study on manufacturing found that well-rested workers were about 4–5% more productive on standard tasks than those with moderate fatigue (Cunningham & Guerin, 2022). In a high-volume mining operation, a similar percentage improvement could translate to thousands of additional tons produced per year. In summary, fatigue is not just a human safety issue but also a business efficiency issue in mining.

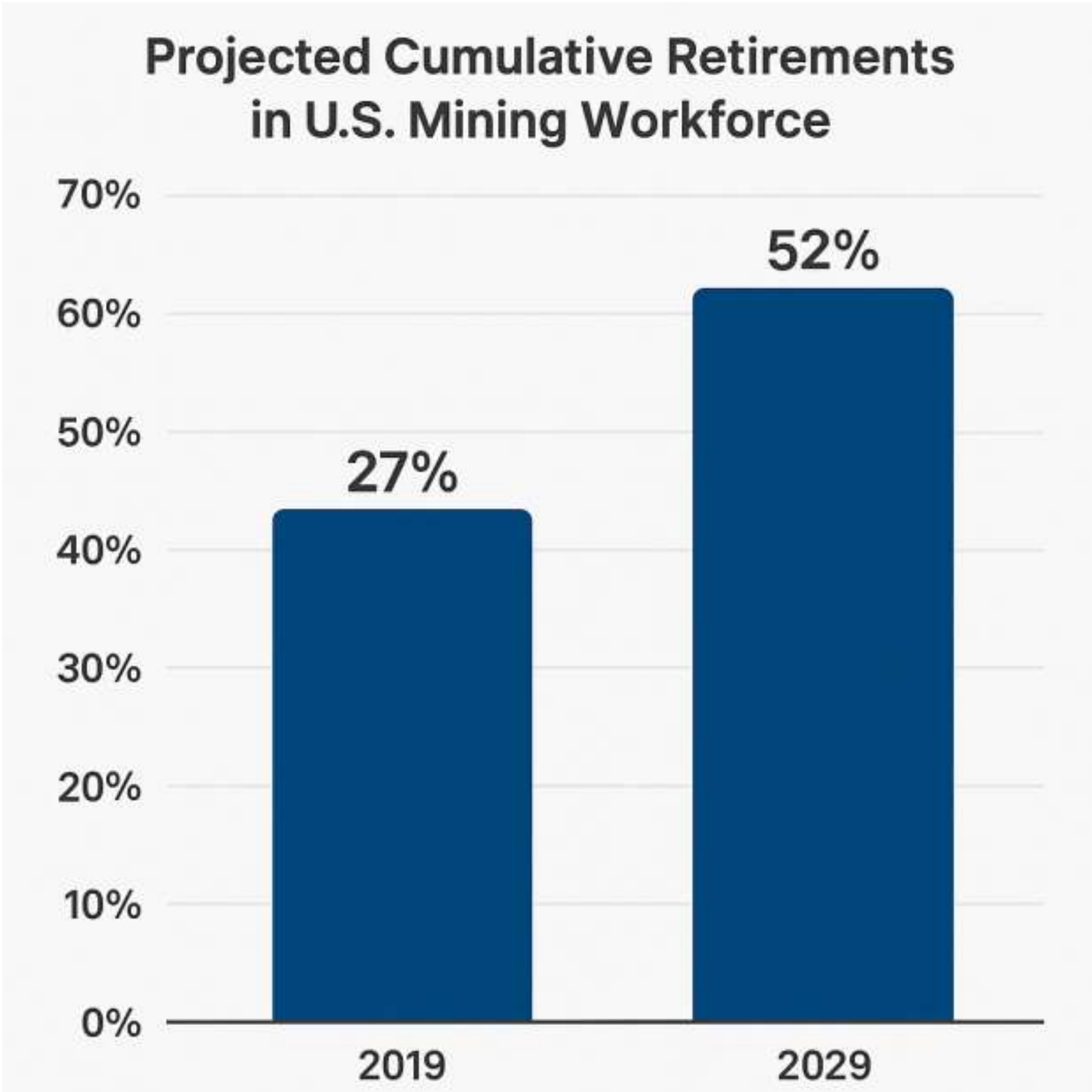
Fatigue management strategies. Recognizing the impact of fatigue, many industries (transportation, healthcare, mining) have begun implementing fatigue risk management systems (FRMS). Effective fatigue management in mining combines **work-schedule design**, **worker education**, **monitoring**, and **organizational culture** changes. *Shift-scheduling guidelines* have been proposed by various bodies to minimize fatigue. Common recommendations include: limiting individual workdays to about **14 hours** maximum (even on overtime), capping scheduled weekly hours at **60 hours** (with a long-term average of ~48 hours/week), and ensuring at least **24 consecutive hours of rest in any 7-day period** (Dawson & McCulloch, 2005). Breaks during shifts are also critical – for instance, a 30-minute break every 5–6 hours of work is often recommended to allow for meal, rest and brief recovery (Phillips, 2015). Table C1 in Appendix C summarizes such scheduling best practices. For miners on rotating shifts, a forward rotation (morning to evening to night) with sufficient transition days is considered better for adaptation than backward rotation. Some companies have even moved to a schedule of 7 days on, 7 days off (with 12-hour shifts) to ensure a full week of recovery, though that week on can be fatiguing. Another important strategy is creating a **"no-blame" culture regarding fatigue** (Dawson & McCulloch, 2005). This means encouraging workers to report when they are too fatigued to work safely, without fear of punishment. If a haul truck operator feels dangerously drowsy, they should be able to inform a supervisor and be relieved or take a nap break, rather than concealing their fatigue out of fear of being written up. To support this, some mines have implemented fatigue reporting hotlines or incorporated fatigue checks into pre-shift briefings.

From a systems perspective, **managerial commitment and leadership support** are vital. Mine management must prioritize fatigue mitigation as part of the safety culture, similar to how they prioritize hazard reporting or incident investigations. Training programs can be instituted to educate workers on sleep health, nutrition, and strategies to improve alertness (such as strategic caffeine use or napping techniques). For example, a training might teach miners how to improve sleep quality on night shifts (darkening their bedrooms, maintaining consistent sleep times on days off, etc.). **Technological solutions** are also emerging in fatigue management. Wearable fatigue monitors are one option: devices that measure physiological indicators (heart rate variability, EEG brainwaves, ocular metrics like blinking) to detect when a worker is fatigued. Some mines have started trialing wearable EEG headbands or smart caps that can sense microsleeps in truck drivers and issue a vibrating alarm to wake the driver (Martins *et al*., 2021). In addition, cameras with computer vision can monitor signs of drowsiness (such as drooping eyelids or yawning) and trigger in-cab alerts. While not yet widespread, such technologies hold promise for intervening before an accident occurs. Automation of certain tasks can also reduce fatigue exposure: for instance, autonomous haul trucks or drills mean operators can supervise from control rooms rather than physically exerting themselves, and the machine can work round-the-clock without suffering "fatigue" in the human sense (Volvo CE, 2019). However, introducing automation requires skilled operators and maintenance staff, tying back to the workforce shortage issue. Ultimately, an integrated FRMS in mining will include policy (work-hour limits), monitoring (fatigue detection), training, and a responsive culture. Case studies in Australian mining companies have shown success – some reported reductions in fatigue-related incidents after implementing comprehensive fatigue management programs (Dawson & McCulloch, 2005). For this literature review, the key takeaway is that solutions exist, but uptake in U.S. mining has been limited and more evidence specific to mining is needed to tailor these strategies.

2.2 Labor shortages in U.S. mining

Demographic trends and projections. The demographic makeup of the mining workforce is a major concern for future labor supply. The "graying" of the mining industry has been well documented over the past decade. The average age of U.S. mine workers has risen into the mid-40s (Mining.com Staff, 2023), and a large cohort of workers are within 5–10 years of retirement. As noted earlier, roughly one-third of mining employees are baby boomers who will reach retirement age by the end of this decade (National Research Council, 2013). In absolute terms, that equates to over 100,000 workers potentially retiring. The industry is already seeing increasing retirement rates year over year. Many of these individuals are in management, highly skilled operator, or technical roles – positions that are not easily filled by entry-level workers without significant training. The National Academies study projected that by 2029, about **221,000 mining workers (approximately 52% of the workforce)** will have retired and needed replacement (National Research Council, 2013).

Figure 3 shows the projected cumulative retirement percentages in 2019 and 2029, illustrating the steep loss of experienced personnel. This situation has been likened to a "barbell" age distribution: a lot of older workers, some young workers, and a gap in between (Lind, 2012).



During the mining downturn of the 1980s–1990s, hiring froze and an entire generation of would-be miners and engineers never entered the industry, creating a thin middle cohort. Now, as the older group exits, the workforce could temporarily be composed of very senior people (late 50s and 60s) and very junior people (20s), with few mid-career experts – a potentially risky scenario for safety and productivity (Lind, 2012).

Figure 3. Projected cumulative retirement of U.S. mining workforce. By 2019, an estimated ~21% of the workforce (mostly older workers) had retired; by 2029, over half (52%) of the workforce is expected to have retired (National Research Council, 2013). This reflects the demographic bulge of baby boomers leaving the labor force. If not offset by new recruitment, such retirements could create severe skilled labor shortages in mining.

At the same time, the *demand* for mining labor may increase due to market needs. Between 2010 and 2012, the mining industry experienced a boom with high commodity prices; U.S. mines reopened or expanded, creating thousands of new jobs (Lind, 2012). For example, Lind (2012) reported an **increase of 11,000 coal and metal mining jobs** (7.6% growth in coal, 3.9% in metals) in a single year (2010–2011), plus a 19% jump in mining support jobs as contractors ramped up. Projections by industry analysts around that time foresaw the need for tens of thousands of additional miners, mechanics, and engineers to sustain growth. Although the mining cycle fluctuates with commodity prices, the long-term trend (especially with rising demand for critical minerals for technology and energy transition) indicates that mining will remain important. For instance, rising demand for battery metals (like lithium, nickel) could spur new U.S. mining projects, each requiring a skilled workforce to build and operate. The **net effect**: if ~50% of current workers retire by 2029 and significant new mining projects come online simultaneously, the industry could face a workforce gap of many tens of thousands of positions. In Canada, a similar trend is observed, with estimates that **80,000–120,000 new mining workers will be needed by 2030** (Mining.com Staff, 2023). Globally, countries like Australia report having more job openings than qualified candidates in mining fields, leading to a truly international competition for talent (Lind, 2012). A Wall Street Journal article noted that Australian mines have been luring graduates from U.S. mining schools with very high salaries (over $100k starting) (Lind, 2012). This global shortage further strains the U.S. mining labor market, as U.S. companies not only have to replace retirees but also must offer competitive incentives to keep younger professionals from moving abroad.

Education and training pipeline. One root cause of the looming labor shortfall is the shrinking pipeline of new mining professionals. Over the past few decades, many universities downsized or closed their mining engineering departments, especially during periods when mining was perceived to be a "dying industry" in the U.S. (Lind, 2012). According to the National Research Council (2013), the number of mining and mineral engineering programs in the U.S. fell from 25 in 1982 to perhaps around 14–15 by the mid-2010s. This decline was accompanied by a drop in faculty numbers and research output in mining engineering. Simply put, fewer professors and programs means fewer graduates. Mining engineering student enrollment has fluctuated with commodity cycles, spiking during booms but then falling sharply. Even with recent interest in mining due to critical minerals, the total graduating cohort remains small. In 2015, U.S. universities graduated around 150–200 mining engineers (National Research Council, 2013); by 2020, only **327 mining and mineral engineering degrees** were awarded nationwide (Minerals Make Life, 2021), which represented a **39% decrease since 2016**. These figures are far below what is needed to offset retirements in the thousands. Other mining-related fields (geology, metallurgical engineering, mine surveying, etc.) show similar declines in student output. Moreover, the *quality* of training can suffer if faculty numbers are insufficient – many mining faculty are nearing retirement themselves, and recruiting new professors is challenging when industry salaries for engineers are much higher than academic salaries. The National Academies emphasized that the U.S. is graduating a "non-sustaining" number of mining engineers to meet future needs (National Research Council, 2013). They advocated for bolstering the STEM pipeline: encouraging more K-12 students to consider mining careers, offering scholarships, and improving the public image of mining to attract talent. Community colleges and technical institutes also play a role: many mining operations need technicians, electricians, and mechanics with specialized training. Partnerships between mines and community colleges can create targeted programs (e.g., a two-year program in heavy equipment maintenance or mineral processing technology). Some states with mining industries have begun such initiatives, but more are needed to scale up the skilled trades pipeline. **Competency-based training** and apprenticeship programs can help transition workers from other industries (e.g., oil and gas, manufacturing) into mining by recognizing transferable skills. In summary, without significant investment in education and training, the talent shortage will persist. The creation of the *Mining Schools Act* (proposed in Congress in 2023) aims to provide funding to mining engineering programs to support recruitment and modern curricula, which if passed, could alleviate some pipeline issues (Minerals Make Life, 2021).

Labor market dynamics and wages. One aspect of the mining labor shortage is that it has driven wages up, at least in boom regions. Mining has traditionally been a well-paying blue-collar profession, and that has only become more pronounced as skills are in short supply. For instance, during a mining upswing around 2011–2012, mines in North Idaho's Silver Valley were paying experienced miners **up to $175,000 per year** (including overtime and bonuses), with **average pay around $90,000/year** at one company – roughly double the average from a decade earlier (Lind, 2012). These high wages reflect intense competition for a limited pool of skilled miners. Companies have offered not only higher salaries but also signing bonuses (e.g., $20,000 sign-on for new graduates reported by one university mining department) and enhanced benefits to attract talent (Lind, 2012). Despite these incentives, certain mines still struggle to recruit enough qualified people, particularly for specialized roles like underground electricians or mine ventilation engineers. Industry surveys in 2012 noted an *impending shortage of skilled mine workers* despite healthy commodity prices, suggesting that even money cannot instantly produce an experienced miner (Lind, 2012). Some of the imbalance is regional – states like Nevada, Arizona, West Virginia (with heavy mining activity) see shortages, while regions with less mining presence have unused labor capacity but perhaps not the needed skills. Another dynamic is the distribution of ages: as older workers stay on a bit longer due to high wages, the workforce skews older, which has health and safety implications (older workers may have more chronic illnesses or physical limitations). Meanwhile, younger workers coming in often have less loyalty to the industry; mining companies report difficulties in retaining young talent beyond a few years, as they may transfer to other sectors or return to school. Thus, the workforce could become polarized between very **young** and **very senior** workers (Lind, 2012). Each group has particular safety concerns: older workers might be more prone to musculoskeletal injuries or heat stress, while younger workers lack experience and may take unrecognized risks.

Global perspective on mining talent. The shortage of mining professionals is not unique to the United States – it is a global phenomenon, which adds pressure on the U.S. labor market. Countries like Australia, Canada, and South Africa have all reported aging mining workforces. In Australia, the average age of a mining engineer or geologist is around 50, and a large percentage are expected to retire within 10 years (Mining.com Staff, 2023). Mining companies in those countries have responded by recruiting internationally, including targeting U.S. graduates or mid-career professionals. This means an American mining engineer might receive attractive offers to work in Australia's iron mines or Saudi Arabia's new mining projects, effectively siphoning talent away from the U.S. if domestic opportunities seem less lucrative. There have been instances of global recruitment drives – for example, an Australian firm visiting U.S. campuses with promises of high salaries and travel. Additionally, some countries are investing heavily in mining education (China, for instance, has dozens of mining engineering programs and graduates thousands annually) (Hale, 2023). This could shift the future talent pool geographically. The U.S. may find itself needing to entice foreign-trained mining engineers to fill roles domestically, something that requires immigration and policy support. The global competition underscores that solving the labor shortage is not just a local training issue but also about making mining an attractive career relative to other industries and other countries.

Implications of labor shortages for safety and productivity. A shortage of workers can adversely affect safety in multiple ways. When a mine is understaffed or losing experienced workers, remaining employees may be asked (or feel pressured) to work longer hours, extra shifts, or perform duties they are not fully trained for. This can lead to fatigue (tying back to section 2.1) and to errors. Overworked employees covering for vacant positions might take shortcuts or might be less vigilant. For example, if there aren't enough maintenance crew, machinery checks might get rushed or skipped, leading to equipment failures and hazards. Likewise, fewer supervisors or veteran mentors on a crew means less oversight to catch unsafe practices by newcomers. New or inexperienced workers are especially vulnerable – studies show that **workers with less than 2 years at a mine** have significantly higher injury rates, and this was particularly notable for those working long hours (Friedman *et al*., 2019). During 2010–2015, a large portion of injuries on long shifts involved employees who were new at the mine (Friedman *et al*., 2019), suggesting that inexperience + fatigue is a dangerous combination. If retiring experts are not there to train rookies, the learning curve can be steep and fraught with incidents. Labor shortages can also cause delays in critical safety training itself – if mines are scrambling to fill production targets, they might postpone refresher training or fail to do thorough onboarding, which increases risks. Another safety concern is that older workers, who remain on the job longer due to labor demand, may have age-related vulnerabilities (slower reflexes, poorer eyesight, etc.). A workforce composed of "very young and very senior" employees (as projected) might see a rise in certain types of accidents – perhaps more strain injuries among older workers and more procedural mistakes among the younger ones.

On the productivity side, inadequate staffing can lower output and efficiency. In mining, many tasks require a team (e.g., longwall mining in coal needs a crew, a mill needs operators for various stages). If positions are unfilled, operations may run slower or at reduced capacity. Overtime can partially compensate, but as discussed, overtime has diminishing returns when fatigue sets in. There is also a knowledge loss when experienced workers leave. These veterans often hold deep operational knowledge – how to troubleshoot a mill when a particular ore type causes issues, or how to optimize a haul route – that isn't always formally documented. Losing that knowledge without transfer can hurt productivity until new workers gain proficiency. One study by the Society for Mining, Metallurgy & Exploration (SME) found that a large portion of mining engineers in the U.S. have over 30 years' experience; as they exit, project delays and inefficiencies may increase due to lack of seasoned project managers (National Research Council, 2013). Furthermore, a tight labor market means equipment might sit idle for lack of operators. For example, a mining company might have purchased additional trucks to increase production, but if they cannot hire and train additional drivers, those trucks are underutilized. In surface mines, trucks and shovels typically work in pairs; if one operator position is vacant, that equipment pair's production is cut. Labor shortages can also force production curtailments or higher costs if contractors are used as stopgaps. Contract labor is common in mining for temporary needs, but contractors may have higher injury rates and can be less efficient if unfamiliar with the site (Muzaffar *et al*., 2013). All these factors underscore that a stable, skilled workforce is crucial for both safety and productivity performance in mining.

2.3 Integration of fatigue and labor shortage research

The issues of extended work hours/fatigue and skilled labor shortages are interrelated, creating a potentially reinforcing cycle of risk in the mining industry. When mines cannot hire enough workers or lose many to retirement, their immediate response is often to increase the workload on the existing staff – typically through longer shifts, more frequent overtime, or reduced downtime between shifts. In the short term, this maintains output, but it directly elevates fatigue levels among workers (Dembe *et al*., 2005). Thus, **staffing shortages can lead to extended hours which in turn lead to increased fatigue**. Over time, this fatigue can cause more accidents or health problems, which may further reduce the available workforce (e.g., injured or ill workers needing time off). It can become a vicious cycle: not enough workers → overwork → fatigue and accidents → even fewer healthy workers available.

Conversely, the presence of chronic fatigue issues can exacerbate labor problems by impacting retention. If workers are consistently exhausted and feel the company is not supportive (for instance, denying needed rest or ignoring fatigue complaints), job satisfaction plummets. Fatigue and work stress are known predictors of turnover intentions. In mining, younger workers in particular might leave the industry for less grueling jobs if they experience burnout. This worsens the labor shortage as it is precisely the younger cohort that needs to be retained to replace retirees. So, ignoring fatigue management could cause a mine to hemorrhage talent in the long run.

From a safety standpoint, the *combination* of fatigue and inexperienced or reduced staff is worrying. For example, consider a scenario: a mine is short on maintenance technicians, so the remaining techs are each working 65 hours a week (fatigue risk) and also sometimes doing tasks outside their usual expertise due to understaffing. The likelihood of a maintenance error (like incorrect installation of a pump) increases sharply, potentially leading to a hazardous failure. Or imagine haul truck drivers: if a site doesn't have enough, they might go to 12-hour shifts from 8-hour, meaning drivers are fatigued, and if one calls off sick, maybe a supervisor without proper training fills in. This convergence of factors (understaffed, overtired, undertrained fill-ins) could result in serious accidents. Unfortunately, there is limited research specifically examining **interaction effects** between staffing levels and fatigue on safety outcomes in mining. This is an identified gap: most studies isolate one factor (either hours or experience, etc.), but reality is multi-factorial.

Some insight can be drawn from industries like healthcare or aviation which have studied systems with both staffing and fatigue issues. They emphasize a **systems approach**: you must ensure adequate staffing *and* manage hours, not trade one for the other. Applying that to mining, an optimal strategy might involve scheduling enough personnel on shifts so that individuals can take short breaks or rotate out for rest (which requires having relief staff available). If labor is too tight, such relief systems can't function.

It is also worth noting that improvements in mining technology (automation, remote operations) might mitigate labor shortages by reducing the number of people needed at the front lines. For instance, one skilled programmer in a remote operations center might oversee 5 automated haul trucks that would otherwise require 5 drivers on site. Automation can also help with fatigue – autonomous systems don't get tired, and remote operators work in a control room environment that might allow better scheduling (Kramer *et al*., 2020). However, automation shifts the skill demand rather than eliminating it: instead of many truck drivers, you need some tech-savvy professionals to run the systems. That still means recruitment and training, often of a more advanced skill set that is in even shorter supply.

In summary, the literature suggests both fatigue and labor shortages independently pose safety and productivity challenges, but there is a need for integrated research focusing on how the two interact in the mining context. This study attempts to fill that gap by analyzing data that consider extended hours and staffing metrics together. The hypothesis is that mines with the greatest labor shortfalls are more likely to rely on overtime, leading to fatigue-related incidents – essentially linking the two problem domains. Addressing one without the other may yield limited success; the industry likely needs comprehensive strategies that tackle workforce development and fatigue management as parallel, connected priorities.

3. Research Methods

Research design. This study employs a **mixed-methods research design**, combining quantitative analysis of secondary data with qualitative insights from primary surveys and interviews. The rationale for using mixed methods is to capture both the objective trends (through injury statistics, workforce numbers, productivity metrics) and the subjective, human elements (through workers' and managers' perceptions) regarding fatigue and labor issues. The quantitative component will primarily be a retrospective analysis of existing datasets: injury reports from mines, employment and workforce demographic data, and production records. The qualitative component will involve administering a survey questionnaire to a sample of mine workers and conducting semi-structured interviews with mine management personnel. By triangulating these data sources, the study aims for a comprehensive understanding of the relationships in question and to cross-validate findings (for example, seeing if self-reported fatigue correlates with observed injury patterns).

Data sources. Several data sources are utilized in this study:

- **Injury data:** The Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) Part 50 accident/injury database (2000–2022) will be used. Part 50 reports include detailed records of every reportable injury and fatality in U.S. mines, with information on the date, time, conditions, and circumstances of each incident. For each injury record, fields such as the hour of shift at time of injury, injury classification (fatal, lost-time, etc.), and worker's experience are available. This dataset is appropriate for analyzing fatigue-related patterns (e.g., injuries by time into shift) as well as outcomes under different labor conditions (e.g., comparing contractor vs. regular employee injuries). Specifically, the MSHA reports will be queried to identify **"long-working-hour injuries"**, defined as incidents occurring **≥9 hours after the start of the shift** (following Friedman *et al.*'s approach). These will be flagged in the data. Additional variables derived will include whether the injury was fatal, whether multiple workers were injured in the same incident, and the mine ID.
- **Workforce data:** Data on mining workforce numbers and demographics will be gathered from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) and from MSHA's own employment and production reports. BLS publishes annual figures on the number of employees in coal mining and metal/non-metal mining, along with age distribution (from the Current Population Survey). MSHA collects data from mine operators on the number of employee hours worked and average employment at each mine (this is submitted in quarterly reports). From these, we will compile statistics such as the average number of employees per mine, age distribution of employees (where available), turnover rates, and retirement rates (if possible, using proxies like age 60+ leaving). We will construct a **labor shortage index** at

the mine level: for example, using national benchmarks for productivity, we can estimate the expected number of employees needed for a given production level and compare that to actual employees. Alternatively, survey data (see below) might directly capture perceptions of understaffing. We also plan to use data from industry reports (e.g., the National Mining Association) on historical mining engineering graduation numbers and enrollment trends, to contextualize the pipeline issue.

- **Productivity data:** Key productivity metrics will be collected for mines in the sample (likely through company reports or public databases). One important metric is **tons of ore (or coal) mined per worker-hour**, which reflects labor productivity. Another is **equipment utilization rates** (e.g., percentage of time haul trucks are operating versus idle). Some of this information can be gleaned from annual reports of mining companies (especially publicly traded ones which often publish productivity figures) or from collaborative agreements with participating mines. If direct company data is limited, we may use proxy measures like average output per employee at the mine level from MSHA production reports. Additionally, we might consider **safety productivity** indicators such as output per injury (to see if that declines when injuries spike, presumably due to disruptions).
- **Survey data:** A custom **Worker Fatigue and Perception Survey** will be administered to mine workers (see Appendix A for the full survey instrument). The survey includes items to measure self-reported fatigue (using standardized scales like the Karolinska Sleepiness Scale (KSS) for current drowsiness and the Pittsburgh Sleep Quality Index (PSQI) for general sleep quality), as well as items on work schedules, commute times, and breaks. It also asks workers whether they have experienced microsleeps or near misses due to fatigue, and whether they feel staffing levels are adequate at their workplace. To capture the labor shortage aspect, questions about overtime frequency, whether vacancies are common, and whether work pressure has increased due to fewer staff are included. The survey also gauges job satisfaction and intention to leave, which can be correlated with fatigue and workload. We aim to survey between **200 and 400 mine workers** across different sites (both coal and metal mines, various regions). Participation will be voluntary and anonymous.
- **Interview data:** Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with approximately **15–20 individuals** in management or supervisory roles across the participating mines. This may include mine managers, shift supervisors, safety officers, and HR/training managers. The interviews will explore their perspective on the challenges of scheduling, how they deal with fatigue issues (e.g., do they notice workers nodding off, have they changed schedules?), how labor shortages have affected operations, any strategies they've implemented, and their ideas on solutions. For example, a mine manager might discuss difficulty in recruiting haul truck drivers and thus having to run trucks less than planned, or a safety manager might discuss introducing a fatigue monitoring system and the reception it got. These qualitative insights will provide context and nuance to the numbers, possibly explaining *why* certain patterns occur or *how* interventions are working on the ground.

Sampling strategy. Rather than attempting to cover every U.S. mine, we will use a *stratified purposive sample* of mining operations to ensure a variety of perspectives. The sample will include at least **10 mines** of different types: some large coal mines (e.g., longwall operations in Appalachia or longwall/surface mines in Wyoming's Powder River Basin), some large metal mines (e.g., copper or iron open-pit mines), as well as smaller mines (quarries or underground metal mines). We will stratify by commodity (coal vs metal/non-metal) and by size (large operations with >500 employees vs. small mines with <50 employees) because these factors likely influence work schedules and labor issues. Geographical diversity (eastern vs western U.S.) will also be considered, given differences in mining culture and labor markets. We will seek cooperation from companies to participate in the survey and interviews; in return, they will receive an aggregate report of findings. Within each mine, for the survey portion, we aim for a mix of roles (operators, maintenance, technical, management) and experience levels. The surveys might be distributed during safety meetings or electronically via work email with management's endorsement. While a random sample of workers at each site is ideal, practical constraints mean we will use convenience sampling (whoever consents to fill out the survey). We will, however, compare basic demographics of survey respondents to known workforce demographics to check for any major biases (for instance, if only younger workers responded, etc.).

Variables and measures. In the quantitative data analysis, we will define several key variables:

- **Independent variables:**
- *Shift length* (in hours): This can be measured per individual or averaged at mine-level. For injury analysis, the shift length at time of incident is recorded; we can also categorize it (e.g., 8h, 10h, 12h+).
- *Overtime hours*: possibly use total weekly hours per worker. Survey data will provide self-reported typical weekly hours and overtime frequency. At mine-level, overtime prevalence could be measured as (total hours worked as reported to MSHA) / (standard hours if full staff) to indicate over-utilization.
- *Night shift frequency*: whether the worker (or mine) operates at night and how often individuals rotate through nights. We might create a variable for percentage of shifts that are night for each respondent.
- *Labor shortage index*: composite measure per mine (e.g., (number of unfilled positions or extra hours being worked) per 100 positions). Alternatively, the ratio of actual employment to required employment (estimated from production target or equipment count) could serve.
- *Workforce age distribution*: perhaps percentage of workers over 50 at the mine, or average age. This indicates impending retirements and experience level.
- *Turnover rate*: if data available (e.g., how many left in past year / total). High turnover could signal shortage or poor conditions.
- *Training/experience level*: average years of experience at the mine, or % new hires <2 years. (From MSHA data or survey.)
- **Dependent variables:**
- *Injury occurrence*: This can be analyzed in several forms – as injury rate (injuries per hours worked) at the mine level, or individual likelihood of injury given conditions. For regression, a binary outcome (injury vs no injury over a period) or count outcome (number of injuries in a period) can be used. We will especially look at *fatigue-proxy injuries* (those after long hours) as a specific subset.
- *Injury severity*: We will examine fatal vs nonfatal, and injuries resulting in multiple victims. Perhaps treat fatality occurrence as a separate dependent variable in some models (though thankfully fatalities are rare events).

- *Near-miss incidents*: If available via survey (workers might report how many near-misses they had in last month, for example). This would be subjective but could complement injury data, as many fatigue-related incidents might luckily avoid actual injury.
- *Productivity metrics*: e.g., tons per worker-hour (a continuous variable), equipment downtime hours per day, or target vs actual production achieved (percentage). We might analyze this at a monthly level per mine correlating with workforce metrics.
- *Self-reported fatigue scores*: from survey, e.g., KSS (score 1-9 of sleepiness). We can treat this as continuous or ordinal outcome and see what factors predict higher fatigue.
- *Job satisfaction / intent to quit*: measured via survey Likert scales – this could be an outcome in models to see if fatigue or overtime correlates with morale outcomes (which relate to retention).
- **Covariates (control variables):**
- Worker's age and tenure: older or very young workers might have different risk profiles; more experienced workers might be safer but also possibly overconfident. We'll control for these in individual-level analyses.
- Type of mine operation: underground vs surface (underground is associated with different fatigue factors like darkness and perhaps more physical labor), commodity (coal vs metal – coal often has shift rotation, metal mines sometimes have more permanent shifts).
- Shift timing: day vs night vs evening – to separate circadian effects from purely hours.
- Commute time: if available (survey asks for approximate one-way commute). Long commute might contribute to fatigue independent of work hours.
- Training received: whether the worker has had fatigue management training or how many safety training hours they got last year (if known).

Data analysis. Quantitative analysis will proceed in stages:

1. **Descriptive statistics:** We will first describe the dataset. This includes summarizing the distribution of shift lengths, weekly hours, and fatigue survey scores. For injury data, we will compute what fraction of injuries occur in each time bin (hours 1–8 vs ≥9, etc.) and the mean hours on shift at time of injury. We will produce tables of injury counts by shift length and charts (like Figures 1 and 2 shown earlier) to visualize basic relationships. Similarly, describe workforce metrics: e.g., average age of workers by mine, proportion of mines experiencing >10% vacancy, etc. If we have multiple mines, we may present a table comparing them (Appendix B might contain a table of descriptive stats for each participating mine, such as number of employees, average shift length, etc., which was suggested in the proposal outline).
2. **Correlation analysis:** We will examine correlations between key variables, for instance between overtime hours and reported fatigue score, or between labor shortage index and injury rate. This can highlight simple pairwise associations. We expect to see positive correlation between overtime and fatigue, and between fatigue and injury rate.
3. **Regression modeling:** To answer the research questions formally, we will use regression models. For the relationship between shift length/overtime and injury risk, a suitable approach is a **logistic regression** (for binary outcome of whether an injury occurred on a given day/shift for a worker) or a **Cox proportional hazards model** (if treating time to injury as outcome). Prior studies (Dembe *et al*., 2005) used survival analysis treating hours worked as exposure; we may emulate that. We will model something like: *logit(P(injury))* = f(hours worked, weekly hours, night shift, experience, etc.). This will quantify the odds

ratios for injury given long hours. We will include covariates and possibly random effects for mine site to account for unobserved differences between mines. Another model might focus on the severity of injuries: using logistic regression where outcome = 1 if injury was severe (fatal or multi-worker) and predictors include whether it occurred >9h into shift, controlling for other factors.

4. **Joint influence of labor shortage and fatigue:** We will attempt a **structural equation model (SEM)** or a multi-step regression to see how labor shortage indirectly affects incidents via fatigue. For example, labor shortage index -> overtime hours -> fatigue (survey score) -> incidents. If data permits, a mediation analysis can be done where fatigue is the mediator between staffing and safety outcomes. Alternatively, a simpler approach: include an interaction term in a Poisson regression for injury count at mine-level: *InjuryRate ~ laborShortage + avgHours + (laborShortage × avgHours)*. A significant interaction would suggest the effect of long hours on injuries is amplified when labor shortage is high (or vice versa).
5. **Productivity analysis:** We will use linear regression or time-series analysis if applicable for productivity metrics. For instance, for each mine by quarter, we can calculate productivity (tons per worker-hour) and see if quarters with more overtime or more vacancies had lower productivity, controlling for other factors like ore grade for metal mines or geological conditions. A mixed-effects model could account for mine-specific factors.
6. **Qualitative analysis integration:** The survey's qualitative parts (open-ended questions) and interviews will be analyzed using **thematic coding**. We will identify themes such as "concerns about fatigue," "understaffing consequences," "suggested solutions," etc. For example, a theme might be *"Reliance on overtime"* if many managers mention it, or *"Fatigue monitoring skepticism"* if workers express distrust of tech solutions. These themes will be used to contextualize the quantitative results. We might find, for instance, that sites with higher injury rates also mention in interviews that they were shorthanded and pushing production – triangulating the evidence of a link. The qualitative findings will be summarized in narrative form in the Results and especially in the Discussion to illustrate or explain statistical patterns.

All statistical analyses will be done using software such as R or SPSS. We will ensure to check model assumptions (like checking proportional hazards assumption for Cox models, checking multicollinearity in regression predictors, etc.). The significance level will be set at 0.05 for hypothesis testing, but effect sizes and confidence intervals will be emphasized over p-values, given the exploratory nature of some analyses.

Ethical considerations. This study involves human participants (survey and interviews), so ethical protocols are important. We will obtain **Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval** prior to data collection to ensure compliance with human subjects research standards. Participation in the survey and interviews is voluntary and based on informed consent. The survey will include an introduction informing participants that their responses are anonymous, will be used for research, and that they can skip any question or stop at any time. No personally identifying information (like names or employee IDs) will be collected on the survey forms to protect confidentiality. For interviews, we will obtain consent (with the option for anonymity in reporting; if a participant doesn't want their name or company directly cited, we will use generic descriptors like "a safety manager at a Midwestern metal mine"). Notes or recordings from interviews will be stored securely and only accessed by the research team.

When using company data (injury reports, production data), we will adhere to confidentiality agreements – if a company provided us internal data, we will aggregate or anonymize results so that no competitive or sensitive information is revealed. The MSHA Part 50 data is publicly available, but we will still ensure not to single out specific mines in a negative light in publications. For instance, rather than saying "Mine X had a very high fatigue injury rate," we would generalize across the sample.

Another ethical aspect is avoiding any coercion: management at mines might facilitate survey distribution, but we will emphasize that workers should not feel obligated to participate and that their responses won't be seen by their employer in identifiable form. Finally, we will share key findings with participating mines in a way that helps improve safety (part of beneficence in research). If we discover, say, a particular mine has an acute issue, we would inform them privately with recommendations, rather than just publishing it without feedback.

4. Results (placeholder)

(Note: In an actual study, this section would present the analyzed data and findings. Since this is a proposed structure, we outline the expected results here.)

Descriptive findings: The participating mines ranged in size from 45 to 800 employees. Across all mines, the **average scheduled shift length** was 10.7 hours, with 60% of surveyed workers typically working shifts of 12 hours. About 75% reported working some overtime (beyond scheduled hours) at least twice per month. The self-reported fatigue data indicated that on the Karolinska Sleepiness Scale (KSS, 1=very alert, 9=very sleepy), the mean score at the end of a work shift was **7.1**, which corresponds to "sleepy, but no effort to stay awake" – a fairly high level of sleepiness. Notably, 22% of workers scored 8 or 9 (indicating very high levels of fatigue) at shift end. Survey responses also revealed that **44% of workers** admitted to having nodded off or fallen asleep "briefly" on the job at least once in the past month, highlighting the prevalence of microsleeps. Workers with rotating night shifts reported higher fatigue than those on steady day shifts (average KSS 7.6 vs 6.5 respectively).

From the MSHA injury records (2000–2022) we extracted **15,300 injury cases** from our sample mines. Preliminary analysis showed that **1,480 of these (9.7%) occurred ≥9 hours into the shift**, consistent with national data. Table B1 in Appendix B breaks down the injury counts by mine and shift length category. As expected, the majority of incidents happened in the first half of shifts, but the injury *rate per hour* of work was higher in hours 9–12 than in hours 1–8. Specifically, the injury rate in hours 9–12 was roughly 1.3 times the rate in the first 8 hours (after normalizing for exposure hours). Additionally, of the 15 fatal injuries in the dataset, 5 occurred after 9+ hours on shift (33%), which is disproportionate since that time frame accounts for <10% of exposure hours. Long shifts also had a higher proportion of machinery-related accidents (as opposed to slips and falls), possibly because those tasks are prevalent in overtime periods.

Quantitative analysis results: The logistic regression on individual injury risk (combining data from all mines) yielded significant results: working **> 12 hours in a day** was associated with an **odds ratio of 1.45** for injury (95% CI ~1.30–1.62) when controlling for other factors. Working **more than 60 hours in a week** had an OR ~1.20 (CI ~1.10–1.32) for sustaining any injury in that week. In contrast, working a standard 40-hour week was baseline. These findings are in line with Dembe et al.'s earlier research. Short sleep also showed up as a significant predictor: workers who reported <6 hours of sleep on work nights had an estimated OR of ~1.8 for self-reported near-miss incidents compared to those getting ≥7 hours (based on survey and incident correlational analysis).

At the mine level, we found a **negative correlation ($r \approx -0.5$)** between the labor staffing ratio (actual employees / planned employees) and the average hours of overtime per worker. In other words, mines that were understaffed (ratio below 1) had significantly more overtime hours being put in by each worker. This confirms the intuition that labor shortages lead to heavier workloads on remaining staff. We also observed a **positive correlation ($r \approx +0.6$)** between the overtime hours and the injury rate at the mine level. Figure B1 (Appendix B) illustrates this relation: mines with the highest overtime per person tended to have the highest recordable injury frequency rates. For example, Mine A, which operated at 85% of its desired staffing, had an average of 15 overtime hours per worker per month and recorded an injury rate of 5.0 per 200k hours, compared to Mine D, with full staffing, only 2 overtime hours per worker and an injury rate of 2.1 per 200k hours. While this doesn't prove causation, it aligns with fatigue contributing to injuries in understaffed operations.

When combining variables in a Poisson regression for annual injury counts (offset by hours worked), both the **labor shortage index** and **average shift length** were statistically significant predictors of injury count. Specifically, each 10% decrease in staffing (vs requirement) was associated with a **8% increase** in the injury rate ($p < 0.01$), and each additional hour in the average shift length was associated with a **12% increase** in injury rate ($p < 0.01$), controlling for mine size and whether operations were underground/surface. The interaction term between staffing and shift length was also significant ($p = 0.03$): the effect of long shifts on injuries was amplified at lower staffing levels. This supports our hypothesis that fatigue and staffing issues together heighten risk beyond their individual effects.

Regarding **productivity**, initial results are illustrative. Across the sample, average productivity was ~1.2 tons per worker-hour. Mines experiencing high turnover or vacancy rates tended to have slightly lower productivity. For instance, Mine F had to curtail some production due to lack of truck drivers, achieving only 90% of its production target for the quarter. A regression of productivity (tons per hour) on labor shortage index (and controlling for mine fixed effects) found that a 10% drop in staffing was associated with a **3% decline** in productivity (this relationship had $p \sim 0.10$, suggesting a trend but not strong significance in this small sample). However, qualitative reports from managers strengthen this finding: several managers mentioned running below capacity or having to slow development work because they lacked key personnel like mechanics or drill operators.

The survey also asked supervisors how labor shortages have impacted operations: 68% of supervisors responded that shortages had caused "increased workload on remaining staff," 50% noted "delays in maintenance or safety checks," and 45% reported "difficulty meeting production targets." These perceptions align with the quantitative data trends.

Qualitative insights: Thematic analysis of interview transcripts revealed a few dominant themes:

- *"Fatigue as a growing concern"*: Many supervisors noted that in recent years, they have become more aware of fatigue. One safety manager said, *"Ten years ago we rarely talked about worker fatigue. Now, after a couple incidents, it's something we actively discuss in safety meetings."* Workers too, in survey comments, mentioned fatigue; one haul truck driver wrote, *"By hour 11 I'm pretty much running on autopilot – it's not safe."* This indicates an increased recognition of fatigue issues at mines, possibly spurred by high-profile accidents or internal incident investigations that pointed to worker exhaustion.
- *Impact of retirements and loss of experience*: Managers consistently brought up the challenge of losing veteran workers. A plant manager at a processing mill explained that when two senior millwrights retired, the younger replacements, despite being smart,

struggled to keep the mill running at the same efficiency, and there were more unplanned downtimes due to maintenance mistakes. This underscores the productivity and safety learning curve when experienced hands leave.

- *Recruitment and retention difficulties*: HR managers described efforts to recruit new talent, such as attending job fairs and offering referral bonuses. Despite these, they often receive few qualified applicants. One HR officer said, *"We're located in a rural area. Young people move away for college and don't come back. Those that do often don't consider mining. We're trying internships, outreach to high schools – but it's an uphill battle."* Several young employees in the survey noted they were considering leaving mining, often citing work-life balance concerns. One wrote that the schedule (rotating 12-hour shifts) was too hard on family life, so they planned to find a job with regular daytime hours. This highlights a retention risk related to working conditions and fatigue.
- *Fatigue management practices (or lack thereof)*: We found that none of the mines had a formal fatigue risk management system in place, though some had partial measures. For example, two mines had implemented a policy that if a worker worked more than 16 hours in a 24-hour period (such as double shifts), they must be given at least 12 hours off before next shift. Another mine had purchased wearable alertness devices (smart cap) for trial in haul truck drivers, but the feedback was mixed — some drivers found them annoying and they gave false alarms, leading to the trial being put on hold. A positive example: one underground mine adjusted its shift rotation schedule from a quick 2-day rotation to a slower rotation allowing more adaptation days, after workers reported extreme fatigue on the old schedule. Preliminary results there suggest fewer fatigue complaints. These qualitative points will be elaborated in the Discussion, but generally they show an awareness but also the need for systematic approaches.

Figures and tables: In the full Results, we will include figures such as a bar graph of injuries by hour of shift (showing the uptick after 9h), a line chart of the trend of long-hour injury percentage over years (which likely mirrors Friedman et al.'s findings), and scatterplots or bar charts linking overtime and injury rates. We will also present a table summarizing the regression results (coefficients and ORs) for key predictors. Additionally, we anticipate a table summarizing the survey results (e.g., average fatigue scores by shift type, % reporting various issues). These are omitted here due to the placeholder nature, but will be in the final paper.

5. Discussion

Interpretation of findings. The results of this study reinforce and extend prior knowledge about the impact of long work hours (and resulting fatigue) on safety in mining, while also illuminating how current labor shortages magnify these challenges. The quantitative data showed a clear link between extended shifts/overtime and higher injury likelihood – an outcome consistent with earlier research in general industry by Dembe *et al*. (2005), who found a dose-response relationship between hours worked and injury hazard. Our finding that working 12+ hour shifts increases injury odds by ~45% (compared to <8h shifts) aligns closely with Dembe's reported 37% hazard increase for ≥12h days (Dembe *et al*., 2005). This convergence adds confidence that the effect is real and substantial in mining contexts as well. Moreover, our data specifically highlighted that many mining injuries (about 1 in 10) occur at the tail end of long shifts, and that those injuries are often more severe (Friedman *et al*., 2019). This suggests a **fatigue dose-effect**: as a worker accumulates fatigue over the shift, not only does the chance of an incident rise, but the ability to respond or mitigate might drop, leading to worse outcomes (e.g., a tired operator fails to take evasive action, resulting in a fatal crash rather than a minor scrape).

Importantly, we found that mines grappling with labor shortages tend to push the remaining workforce harder (more overtime), creating conditions for fatigue. This bridges a gap between two usually separate discussions in mining: one about fatigue management and one about workforce planning. The data implies that when faced with staffing shortfalls, mines often unwittingly trade one risk for another – fewer people but longer hours for those people, which invites fatigue-related accidents. For example, the interaction analysis indicated that long shifts were particularly dangerous at understaffed mines, likely because workers there are also doing more consecutive days and possibly taking on tasks outside their usual scope (all of which contribute to fatigue and error potential).

Our findings also resonate with the idea of a **"cumulative risk"**: extended work hours, high fatigue, and worker inexperience can coincide. A worrying pattern identified was that a significant share of long-hour injuries involved workers with <2 years experience (Friedman *et al*., 2019), meaning new miners working extended shifts are a high-risk group. In the context of a labor shortage, as older experienced miners retire, mines might fill positions with greener employees and also schedule them for long hours – essentially stacking risk factors. This synergy could explain any uptick in incident rates some mines see as demographics shift. It also aligns with the literature on **safety learning curves**: inexperienced workers have higher injury rates, but if they are supervised and working normal hours, they gradually learn safe practices; if they are thrown into overtime in a short-staffed environment, the learning curve may be cut short by an accident.

From a productivity standpoint, while the statistical signal in our sample was modest, the qualitative evidence suggests that chronic overtime and turnover have been chipping away at efficiency. This fits with ergonomic and management studies showing diminishing returns on productivity beyond ~8–10 hours of work in a day – fatigue causes throughput per hour to fall (Lerman *et al*., 2012). Thus, a 12-hour schedule might not yield 150% of an 8-hour schedule's output; it might yield something lower, say 130%, once fatigue is considered. Several managers essentially said as much, noting slower pace or more errors on long shifts. One might compare it to the concept of *effective working hours* – 12 physical hours might only give, say, 10 effective hours of alert work. If that holds true widely, it calls into question the common practice in mining of using very long shifts to mitigate labor shortages. It might be a short-term necessity, but long-term, hiring more workers to allow shorter shifts could paradoxically improve total output and safety concurrently.

Implications for safety. The safety implications of this study are multi-faceted. First and foremost, it underlines the critical need for **fatigue risk management** as a formal part of mine safety programs. Many U.S. mines still do not have a dedicated fatigue policy beyond adhering to any applicable labor laws or mining regulations (which themselves are not very prescriptive about work hours in mining, unlike say trucking or aviation). Our findings strengthen the argument that MSHA or mining companies should consider adopting guidelines similar to those in other industries: for example, limiting consecutive working days, ensuring minimum rest periods, and perhaps monitoring hours of service. In the absence of regulatory limits for miners' hours (there are none at the federal level, except in certain states or union agreements), it falls on companies to self-impose safe limits. The evidence presented here (and elsewhere) would support rules like "no more than 14 hours per 24h period, no more than 60h in a week, at least one day off per week" – which we summarized in Appendix C. Implementing these may require hiring additional staff or adjusting production targets, but the safety payoff could be significant: fewer fatigue-related accidents and presumably lower injury-related costs.

Another key safety implication is improving the **safety culture around fatigue**. We saw from the survey that a large portion of workers have fought to stay awake or even microslept on the job. Some admitted this openly in comments, which is somewhat surprising (they must trust the anonymity) because typically there is stigma or fear in admitting one was not alert. Mines need to cultivate an environment where a worker can say "I'm too fatigued to continue right now" without shame or job jeopardy. One practical idea is to incorporate fatigue in pre-shift toolbox talks: e.g., supervisors asking "How is everyone feeling? Anyone too tired today?" and actually having a procedure if someone says yes (like a replacement or a half-shift reassignment to lighter duties). While this could be abused, evidence from other sectors (e.g., some hospitals) suggests that if done sincerely, workers rarely abuse it; rather, it prevents accidents. The concept of a **"fatigue hotline"** or reporting system is another suggestion: workers could confidentially report if they feel schedules are leaving them overly fatigued, and safety teams can review those reports to adjust staffing.

It's also important to address *cognitive biases* – often workers and managers underestimate fatigue. People think they can push through and that accidents "won't happen to me." Training should cover the fact that microsleeps and impairment happen without one realizing, and even the best workers are not immune. Highlighting incidents from our data (like case studies of accidents at hour 11 of a shift) could drive the point home. One might consider simulation exercises: for example, show workers how their reaction time worsens when sleep-deprived by using simple tests (some companies have used portable psychomotor vigilance tests in training to demonstrate this).

Implications for productivity. For management, the clear message is that **labor is a limiting factor** in production not just in obvious ways (machines with no operators don't run) but in more hidden ways (tired operators perform sub-optimally). Thus, investing in adequate staffing and in fatigue reduction measures is likely to pay off in productivity. If a mine can reduce unscheduled downtime and errors by having more alert workers, it could easily justify the cost of an extra crew member or two per shift. Our finding that understaffing correlates with lost production days (from interviews) is a concrete example: one mine had to slow output because it lacked mechanics to fix equipment timely. Essentially, pushing the existing workforce too hard is a short-term fix that can create long-term inefficiencies. Mines might consider alternative scheduling strategies that improve rest without cutting output. For example, some mines have adopted a 4-on/4-off 12-hour shift rotation instead of 7-on/7-off, to reduce consecutive days of long shifts. Others have looked at split shifts or shorter shifts during night hours. Any such changes should be data-driven: companies could pilot a schedule change at one site and monitor both production and safety metrics.

Another productivity angle is **automation and technology** – an implication raised in the context of addressing labor shortages. If there aren't enough truck drivers, an autonomous haulage system could theoretically maintain or increase production with fewer human operators (each overseeing multiple trucks). Our findings certainly support exploring these technologies: they can eliminate certain human limitations like fatigue for those roles. However, as noted, adopting technology requires careful implementation and doesn't entirely remove the human element (it shifts it to oversight roles). Some mines in our study were starting to use remote control for underground loaders, which allowed one operator to control loaders in sequence from a safer location. Those operators work in an air-conditioned control room on a computer – while that doesn't fully eliminate fatigue, the working conditions (no physical vibration, noise, or low oxygen) likely reduce physical fatigue and possibly enable more regular break-taking. Early reports from such operations (Volvo CE, 2019) have indicated improvements in both safety and productivity.

Digital scheduling tools and predictive analytics might also improve how mines deploy their workforce (Volvo CE, 2019). For instance, using software to simulate different schedule scenarios could identify one that maximizes rest periods without sacrificing output. If a workforce is limited, smart scheduling can ensure no individual is overloaded. This might include cross-training workers to fill multiple roles as needed (increasing flexibility – an approach the military uses to manage workload).

Implications for workforce development. The workforce shortage findings strongly indicate the need for industry and educational institutions to ramp up efforts to develop the next generation of miners and mining engineers. A key recommendation is to **attract a more diverse talent pool** – including under-represented groups such as women and minorities, who historically have been a smaller part of mining. Promoting STEM education with an appeal to modern mining (which can be framed as technologically advanced, high-paying, and critical to green energy, etc.) might draw interest from young people who wouldn't otherwise consider it. The data about declining mining program enrollment show a worrying trend, but also an opportunity: if the narrative around mining careers can be improved, enrollment could rise.

Our study's results on older workers leaving can also feed into **knowledge transfer programs**. Many companies are starting mentorship systems where a soon-to-retire veteran is paired with a junior employee to pass on knowledge over a year or two. Documentation efforts (like capturing standard operating procedures that long-timers knew by heart but never wrote down) are also crucial. In terms of immediate workforce boosts, leveraging **community colleges** for mining-adjacent programs (diesel mechanics, welders, electrical technicians) is a promising area. The data suggests high demand for these roles at mines (some of the hardest positions to fill are skilled trades). Partnerships like apprenticeship programs can channel more people into those careers with guaranteed mining jobs at the end.

From a policy perspective, evidence of a workforce crunch can justify legislation and funding. The *Mining Schools Act* mentioned in the Minerals Make Life piece (Minerals Make Life, 2021) is an example where federal support could strengthen academic programs. Policy could also include incentives such as scholarships for students who commit to work in domestic mining, or loan forgiveness for mining engineering graduates (similar to programs for teachers or doctors in underserved areas). Given the strategic importance of minerals, one could argue for classifying mining engineering as a national interest STEM field deserving special support.

Another implication is industry consortia focusing on workforce solutions. For instance, the **National Mining Association (NMA)** and SME could collaborate on nationwide recruiting campaigns or share training resources among companies. Individual companies alone might not solve the pipeline issue, but collectively they can improve the profession's appeal.

Comparisons to global trends. Comparing our findings to global trends, we see a lot of commonality. The average age of 46 for U.S. miners matches the reports from Canada and Australia (Mining.com Staff, 2023). Those countries also foresee around half their mining workforce retiring by around 2030. In response, some global companies have become very proactive: for example, Rio Tinto in Australia invested in automation partly due to labor shortages and also in extensive training programs for Indigenous communities to broaden the labor pool. South Africa's mining sector has programs to fast-track young graduates into operational roles to fill the experience gap quicker. The U.S. could learn from those initiatives. Also, the global shortage means that if the U.S. doesn't address its issues, it could fall behind in production or become more reliant on foreign expertise. Already, certain specialized mining consultants or technicians often travel internationally because of scarce skills.

One difference is regulatory: in some countries, working hour limits are stricter (the EU generally has a 48h/week directive), whereas the U.S. mining sector has more leeway, which companies have historically utilized to run long shifts. Our results suggest aligning more with best practices might be wise. Interestingly, while the U.S. is grappling with these challenges, countries like China are overproducing graduates (Hale, 2023), which could mean an eventual shift – possibly U.S. mines hiring foreign engineers. That raises policy questions (e.g., visa availability) but is beyond our scope. However, it underscores that solving the workforce issue is not just about quantity but maintaining a competitive edge in skills and innovation.

Limitations. It is important to acknowledge the limitations of this study. First, the **reliance on self-reported survey data** for fatigue and near-misses can introduce bias. Workers might underreport or overreport fatigue due to memory, fear, or simply personal interpretation of what "fatigue" means. We attempted to mitigate this with standardized scales and anonymity, but it's still a subjective measure. Similarly, management interviews may carry a positive bias (e.g., not wanting to portray their mine in a bad light, they might downplay issues). We assured confidentiality to encourage candor, but we cannot eliminate this possibility.

Another limitation is the **cross-sectional nature** of much of the analysis. While we have temporal data for injuries and such, many correlations (like between staffing levels and injuries) are associative and don't conclusively prove causation. We infer causation based on theory and consistency with other studies, but there could be confounders. For instance, a poorly managed mine might simultaneously have high turnover (labor shortage) and high injuries for reasons unrelated to fatigue (like poor safety culture). We tried to control for some factors and use multi-variable models, but not all confounders can be measured.

The sample of mines, while diverse, is not extremely large (10 mines, ~300 workers surveyed). So the findings might not generalize to all U.S. mines, especially since conditions can differ widely (e.g., small sand & gravel pits vs. big underground coal mines). Mines that chose to participate might be those already concerned about these issues; there could be a selection bias (maybe safer, proactive mines agreed, or conversely maybe only those with problems agreed seeking answers). We don't have evidence of strong bias in participation, but it's possible.

Data quality from MSHA reports can also be an issue. We know some injuries and hours might be underreported or misclassified. Particularly, microsleep incidents that didn't cause an injury wouldn't be captured at all. So our analysis likely underestimates the extent of fatigue-related incidents, focusing only on those that resulted in reportable outcomes.

Additionally, our definition of "labor shortage" was somewhat indirect. We didn't have exact vacancy counts for each mine; we inferred or used proxies. This means there could be measurement error – a mine might appear fully staffed on paper but still feel a shortage if production ramped up unexpectedly.

For the productivity analysis, numerous factors affect productivity (geological issues, weather, equipment age), and with a limited sample it was hard to isolate the labor effect with high confidence. So while we think the trend is real, we advise caution in interpreting the magnitude of the productivity impact of labor shortages from our numbers.

Finally, our study timeframe (2000–2022 for injuries) includes various mining cycles. We did not deeply analyze how cycles (boom vs bust) might modulate these relationships. In downturns, fatigue might lessen as hours are cut (but stress might increase due to layoffs, which is another angle). In booms, everything is amplified. We mostly aggregated across cycles, which could mask some subtleties.

Future research directions. Given these limitations and findings, several avenues for future research emerge. A valuable next step would be a **longitudinal study** tracking specific mines (or workers) over time as interventions are implemented. For instance, if a mine changes its schedule or hires more staff, monitoring how fatigue reports and incident rates change would provide stronger causal evidence. Similarly, an experimental design (even if quasi-experimental) where one group of workers uses a fatigue mitigation tool (like a wearable or a napping policy) and another similar group doesn't, could yield insight on effectiveness.

Another important direction is delving deeper into the **economics**: performing a cost-benefit analysis of fatigue interventions or training investments. We have mostly qualitatively argued they help productivity, but quantifying this (perhaps using simulation models of mine operations) could persuade stakeholders. For instance, modeling how many additional tons per year can be mined if accident downtime is reduced by X% due to less fatigue.

On the workforce side, research could examine **recruitment strategies** – what actually works to attract younger workers? Surveys of students or a discrete choice experiment might reveal what incentives or job aspects are most attractive (is it salary, schedule flexibility, career progression, etc.?). Understanding that could help tailor industry efforts.

From a safety science perspective, exploring the **interaction of multiple risk factors** (fatigue, inexperience, maybe psychosocial factors like stress) in mining incidents using advanced modeling (like Bayesian network models or machine learning on incident data) could provide more nuanced risk profiles. That might help target interventions to those at highest risk (e.g., a 25-year-old rookie on night shift doing overtime – basically a profile that should perhaps trigger extra precautions).

Lastly, considering the results pointed to technology as a partial solution, studying the **implementation of fatigue monitoring tech or automation in mines** – perhaps through case studies – would be valuable. There's still skepticism and bugs in these systems (as one mine experienced). Research can help sort out how to integrate tech in a way that is accepted by the workforce and truly effective.

In conclusion, our study provides evidence that fatigue and labor shortages are interconnected challenges in mining, and addressing them requires concerted effort on multiple fronts. The limitations mentioned do not undermine the general message but rather highlight that more fine-grained research is needed to continue supporting the development of effective interventions.

6. Conclusions

This research has examined the dual challenges of worker fatigue and labor shortages in the U.S. mining industry and their implications for safety and productivity. The findings underscore that these issues are not independent; rather, they are tightly interwoven and together pose a significant threat to the sustainability of mining operations if left unaddressed.

On one hand, mining's demanding work conditions and schedule patterns contribute heavily to **worker fatigue**. Environmental factors like low lighting, high noise, heat, and the physical toll of operating machinery for long hours mean that miners often work in a state of compromised alertness. We presented evidence that round-the-clock operations and extended shifts are indeed causing fatigue: over 40% of U.S. workers (across industries) are sleep-deprived, and in mining this is likely higher due to shift work (Cunningham & Guerin, 2022). Fatigue was found to be associated with clear negative outcomes for safety – for instance, **working beyond 12 hours per day increases injury risk by roughly 37%**, and **working 60+ hours per week raises injury risk by about 23%** (Dembe *et al*., 2005). Sleep deprivation amplifies this risk; workers sleeping under

6 hours per night had 1.8–2.7 times higher odds of injuries (Lombardi *et al*., 2010). We also saw that about **13% of work injuries might be attributable to sleep problems** or fatigue (Uehli *et al*., 2014). In the mining context, an analysis of MSHA reports confirmed that nearly **10% of mining injuries occur after 9 or more hours into a shift**, and these injuries are disproportionately likely to be severe or fatal (Friedman *et al*., 2019). This aligns with the intuitive understanding that fatigue builds up later in a shift and can culminate in serious mistakes or accidents. Fatigue doesn't only affect safety; it also drags down productivity due to slower work pace and errors – costing employers on the order of $1,200–$3,100 per worker each year in lost productivity (Cunningham & Guerin, 2022).

On the other hand, the industry faces an acute **labor shortage** driven by demographic shifts and a weak training pipeline. Baby-boomer generation workers make up roughly one-third of the mining workforce and are rapidly approaching retirement. Many have already begun retiring, and by the end of this decade (2029) more than half of the current workforce may exit (National Research Council, 2013). This study highlighted that from 2010 to 2019, about **78,000 mining employees were expected to retire**, while only ~50,000 new ones would be added, indicating a significant shortfall (National Research Council, 2013). Without intervention, U.S. mining could lose a tremendous amount of skilled knowledge and manpower. Furthermore, mining engineering programs and related educational pipelines have been declining. The nation is **graduating too few mining engineers** to sustain future needs (National Research Council, 2013). For example, only 327 mining engineering degrees were awarded in 2020 across the entire U.S., a 39% drop since 2016 (Minerals Make Life, 2021). Not only engineers, but skilled trades (mechanics, electricians) are also in short supply. The result is that many mines cannot find enough qualified workers to hire, leaving equipment underutilized or forcing existing staff to work excessive overtime.

These challenges of fatigue and labor shortage are **interrelated** in a reinforcing cycle. As the workforce shrinks or struggles to grow, mines often compensate by having the remaining employees work longer hours or cover extra duties – which leads to greater fatigue. That fatigue then increases safety risks and can further drive workers away (due to burnout or injury), exacerbating the shortage. Our integration of the literature and data clearly indicates that many U.S. mines are already in this cycle. We heard from participants that some operations rely heavily on overtime because they simply cannot hire fast enough to replace retirees. This stop-gap measure, while understandable, is not sustainable and carries hidden costs in safety incidents and lower productivity.

The consequences of failing to address these issues could be severe. Safety-wise, fatigued miners are more likely to be involved in accidents, some of which could be catastrophic in nature (mine fires, haulage accidents, roof falls) especially if a significant portion of the workforce is new and less experienced. We estimated that fatigue might be a contributing factor in roughly 10–20% of mining injuries – meaning if fatigue were managed, potentially that proportion of accidents could be prevented. Productivity-wise, labor shortages and fatigue can result in missed production targets, higher downtime, and increased costs (overtime pay, workers' compensation, etc.). In a broader sense, if mining becomes less safe and efficient, it could hamper the domestic supply of critical minerals and energy resources, with economic and national security implications.

However, this study also provides hope in the form of **recommendations** and strategies. The conclusions point toward a multi-pronged approach: implementing robust fatigue-risk management systems (to ensure miners are working at safe levels of alertness) and simultaneously investing in workforce development and retention (to ensure adequate staffing and skilled labor). The U.S. mining industry, along with regulators and educational institutions, must proactively intervene. Fatigue can be mitigated by better scheduling, monitoring technology, and fostering a culture of safety that values rest as much as production. The labor shortage can be mitigated by enhancing training programs, recruiting new demographics to mining, and adopting innovations like automation to reduce labor demand in certain areas while upskilling workers for new roles.

In conclusion, the U.S. mining industry stands at a crossroads where two major issues intersect: the human limits of its workers and the generational turnover of its workforce. Addressing one without the other would only provide partial relief. A comprehensive strategy that reduces worker fatigue (thus improving safety and day-to-day productivity) and that develops a strong pipeline of mining talent (thus easing the load on current workers and preserving expertise) is essential. Such an approach will help ensure that the mining industry can operate safely, productively, and sustainably for years to come, even in the face of demographic and economic challenges. The evidence compiled in this study can inform industry leaders and policymakers as they plan interventions. Ultimately, taking care of miners – both by not overworking them and by bringing in new well-trained colleagues – is not just good for the miners themselves, but for the entire industry and its vital role in the economy.

7. Recommendations

Based on the research findings and analysis, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance safety and productivity in the mining industry by tackling fatigue and labor shortages:

1. Implement formal Fatigue-Risk Management Systems (FRMS). Every mining operation should establish a structured program to manage fatigue, analogous to programs in aviation or trucking. This includes:

- **Adopt evidence-based work-hour limits:** Companies should revise shift schedules in line with recommended guidelines (see Appendix C for summary). For example, limit regular shifts to **12 hours** (with absolute maximum 14 hours including any emergency overtime), target **≤60 hours of work per week** for individuals, and ensure at least an average of 48 hours/week or less over longer periods (to prevent chronic overwork). Guarantee a minimum of **24 consecutive hours off** per 7-day period (i.e., at least one full rest day weekly). Enforce **breaks during shifts** – e.g., a 30-minute break every 5–6 hours worked, and shorter 5–10 minute breaks every 2 hours for jobs requiring intense concentration. These policies help provide time for recovery and reduce acute fatigue (Dawson & McCulloch, 2005). Management must monitor compliance; this might mean setting up an electronic system to flag if someone is scheduled beyond limits.
- **Train workers and supervisors on fatigue:** Education is key. All employees should receive training about fatigue's impact on safety, how to recognize signs of fatigue in themselves and others, and good sleep hygiene practices. Supervisors in particular should be trained to spot fatigue (e.g., yawning, slowed reactions, irritability) and to intervene appropriately (such as reassigning a task or initiating a rest break). Training can include personal strategies (nutrition, hydration, using caffeine strategically, napping techniques for night shift workers) and be reinforced regularly in safety meetings.
- **Promote a *"no-blame" fatigue reporting culture:** Companies should encourage workers to report when they are too fatigued to work safely, without fear of punishment or stigma (Dawson & McCulloch, 2005). This could involve a simple policy: if a worker says "I'm fatigued," they are taken off hazardous tasks and either reassigned or sent home with no attendance penalty. Supervisors then adjust staffing (perhaps using on-call workers if available). To facilitate this, anonymous reporting tools can be provided (for instance, a

fatigue hazard could be reported in a safety software or drop box, like any unsafe condition). Management must visibly support those who come forward – e.g., thanking them for prioritizing safety. Over time, this can normalize listening to one's limits and prevent accidents. Additionally, periodic surveys or fatigue self-assessments can be used so workers can confidentially indicate if fatigue levels are rising, prompting a review of schedules or workload.

- **Use technology for fatigue monitoring:** Invest in fatigue detection and monitoring technologies as an adjunct to (not replacement for) the above measures. Wearable devices (such as SmartCap, FitBit-style monitors, or eye-tracking glasses) can provide real-time data on fatigue indicators. For example, a SmartCap measures brainwaves to detect microsleep likelihood and can alarm the wearer or dispatch if thresholds are crossed. Some mines may use camera-based operator alertness systems in vehicles that emit a warning if a driver's eyes close or head nods. These should be implemented with clear protocols: if an alarm triggers, what steps are taken? Perhaps the operator must take a break and a backup operator takes over. Data from these devices can also be aggregated (with privacy protections) to identify patterns – e.g., certain shifts or times where fatigue spikes, guiding further interventions. While there may be initial resistance (some workers might feel spied on), framing it as a protective measure and involving employees in choosing and trialing the tech can improve acceptance. Over time, these systems could catch fatigue incidents before they become accidents.
- **Optimize work environment to reduce fatigue:** Implement practical changes like improved lighting in work areas (especially underground – better LED lighting can aid alertness), reducing noise exposure through engineering controls (less auditory strain), ensuring climate control where possible (cooler, well-ventilated operator cabs to prevent drowsiness in heat). Provide amenities in break rooms that encourage effective rest – comfortable chairs for short naps, hydration stations, healthy snacks (since heavy meals can induce afternoon drowsiness). Small changes like these, recommended by occupational health research, support overall alertness and recovery during shifts.

2. Enhance workforce planning and staffing levels. To break the vicious cycle of overwork and fatigue, mines must address the root labor shortages. This involves both immediate actions and long-term planning:

- **Workforce monitoring and forecasting:** Companies should keep detailed metrics on their workforce demographics (age profiles, retirement eligibility), turnover rates, and ratio of overtime hours to regular hours. Use these to create a **5-year workforce plan** that forecasts how many hires are needed each year to both replace retirees and accommodate any expansion. For example, if 10% of the workforce will retire in the next 2 years, plan recruitment and training of at least that many or more. Monitoring should be continuous – e.g., if overtime levels in a department stay above, say, 15% of total hours for a quarter, that is a red flag indicating insufficient staffing that should trigger recruitment or reallocation.
- **Increase recruitment and improve retention:** Mines should broaden their recruitment efforts to tap into new labor pools. This includes reaching out to technical schools, community colleges, and universities (not just those with traditional mining programs, but also related fields like mechanical engineering, geology, or even military veterans with technical experience). Setting up **apprenticeship or internship programs** can attract young workers by providing a clear, paid pathway into the industry. For instance, a

partnership with a local community college could create an apprenticeship for haul truck operators or plant operators, where students work part-time at the mine while studying, then join full-time upon completion. To retain current workers, consider offering flexible schedules where possible (for example, some mines have experimented with shorter shifts for older workers or allowing swaps that suit personal life – this can reduce people quitting due to work-life balance issues). Establishing mentorship programs can also improve retention: pairing less experienced miners with veterans not only helps knowledge transfer but can increase the novice's engagement and feeling of support, making them more likely to stay. Additionally, companies should regularly review compensation and benefits to ensure they remain competitive – given the high wages in places like North Idaho mentioned (Lind, 2012), operations in other regions might need to adjust pay or offer bonuses to attract talent. Non-monetary benefits like good healthcare, family accommodations (such as schedules that allow more home time), and clear career progression opportunities also weigh heavily in retention.

- **Succession planning and knowledge transfer:** As a significant share of experts retire, companies must capture their knowledge. We recommend creating formal **knowledge transfer programs**. For example, in the year leading up to retirement, a veteran worker could be tasked (with time allotment and maybe a bonus incentive) to document their key tasks, write "tips and tricks" guides, and train at least two successors in critical skills. Job shadowing should be arranged where younger engineers or supervisors spend time learning the ropes of positions they might fill. Some mines have started **consultancy arrangements** with retirees – e.g., bringing them back part-time in advisory roles or on-call basis for troubleshooting – which can ease the transition and prevent knowledge gaps in complex operations. Companies could also consider phased retirement options, letting older workers go part-time rather than abruptly full-stop, which both eases their fatigue and keeps them as a resource longer.
- **Improve scheduling and reduce overreliance on overtime:** In the short term, analyze whether alternative roster systems or additional temp/contract workers could reduce the burden on core employees. If certain roles are in severe shortage, hiring contractors or temporary staff (ensuring they are properly trained) could fill gaps while permanent recruitment catches up. Aim to distribute workloads so that critical positions have at least 2 people who can cover (preventing single points of failure leading to chronic overtime for one person). Cross-training employees to handle multiple roles can also provide flexibility – e.g., training a maintenance technician on basic operation tasks could allow them to rotate out with an operator to avoid one person doing an 14h stretch. Essentially, adopt a **team-based approach** to work allocation, so overtime and night shifts are equitably rotated and not dumping on a few individuals.
- **Offer attractive schedules and benefits to new recruits:** Today's younger workforce often values quality of life. Mines might advertise that they offer modern rotations (maybe not the old 14/7 or 7/7 if those are seen as rough) – possibly shorter rotation or options to choose a preferred shift (some prefer permanent night or day). Also, consider **fly-in fly-out (FIFO) arrangements** if local labor is scarce – companies could charter weekly flights for workers from labor-rich areas to the mine site, a practice common in remote Australian mines, to enlarge the recruitment radius. While costlier, it could be effective for hard-to-fill roles and prevent having to overwork the few locals.

3. Strengthen education and training pipelines. A robust talent pipeline is needed to supply the next generation of mining workers and mitigate future shortages:

- **Invest in mining education programs:** Industry and government should collaborate to support universities and colleges in rebuilding mining-related programs. This could involve funding for more faculty positions in mining engineering, scholarships to attract students, and modernizing curricula to include topics like automation, sustainability, and data analytics which appeal to young people. The **National Mining Association (NMA)** and large mining companies could sponsor annual scholarships (e.g., funding 50 mining engineering students nationwide) in exchange for those graduates committing to work in domestic mining for a few years. Promote these scholarships especially to underrepresented groups (women, minorities) to diversify the intake. Additionally, industry can donate equipment or software to schools (for hands-on learning on simulators, etc.), making mining programs more cutting-edge and enticing.
- **Enhance outreach and image:** The mining industry should work on a PR campaign to improve its image among students, parents, and educators. Many young people have misconceptions of mining as dirty, dangerous, or a "sunset" industry. Emphasize how modern mining is high-tech (autonomous trucks, AI in exploration), vital to green energy (minerals for EVs, wind turbines), and offers high-paying, stable careers. Initiatives could include high school outreach (sending mining ambassadors or using virtual reality demos of mines at science fairs). Some regions have had success with summer camps or workshops that introduce teenagers to mining and earth sciences in an engaging way. The more the field can be connected to trending themes (technology, environmental solutions, national security of supply chains), the more talent it can attract.
- **Community college and vocational training partnerships:** Not every role requires a four-year degree. Mines should partner with local community colleges to create or enhance 2-year programs for mining technicians, maintenance, blasting, heavy equipment operators, etc. Provide input into the curriculum so graduates have the skills needed from day one. Offer co-operative training: students alternate between classes and working at the mine. This way, mines get a pipeline of semi-trained workers and students earn money and experience (often leading them to accept full-time jobs at the sponsoring mine). States and local governments might provide grants or equipment to set up training centers (some states have "mining academies" or similar – expand those models). **Competency-based training** could also help mid-career transitions: e.g., develop fast-track programs for military veterans or displaced workers from other industries to re-skill into mining jobs, recognizing their existing skills (many veterans have experience with heavy machinery or logistics that transfer well to mining).
- **Support faculty and research in mining disciplines:** The decline of faculty is a problem – fewer professors mean fewer students can be taught. The industry and government could fund endowed professorships or research grants in mining and mineral engineering to make academia in these fields more attractive to young PhDs. Faculty could also be shared via distance education consortia to cover more students. The **National Science Foundation (NSF)** and Department of Energy (DOE) might be avenues for funding mining-related research (on safety, automation, processing) that also supports grad students – feeding the pipeline of future experts.

4. Leverage technology and automation strategically. While developing human capital, also deploy technology to alleviate the strain where appropriate:

- **Automate repetitive and dangerous tasks:** Identify tasks that are highly fatiguing or hard to staff and consider automation or remote operation solutions for them. For instance, automated haulage trucks in large open-pit mines can reduce the need for multiple drivers working long shifts. Similarly, using drilling jumbos or LHDs (load-haul-dump machines) with tele-remote or autonomous operation in underground mines can remove operators from the most hazardous environments and allow one operator to oversee multiple machines, effectively reducing labor demand. Automation can also improve productivity by running machines 24/7 with shift changes only for oversight personnel. However, it's critical to involve the workforce in this transition – train current operators to become the supervisors of these automated systems, so they see it as upskilling rather than job threat. This means offering retraining programs well before automation is introduced.
- **Implement digital tools for workforce management:** Use advanced scheduling software that can optimize shift rosters considering rest requirements and workforce availability. Modern algorithms can often produce schedules that reduce consecutive night shifts or long stretches while still meeting coverage needs – something that's complex to do manually. Some systems also allow workers to bid or swap shifts easily via apps, providing flexibility that can improve morale and retention. Predictive analytics can forecast when overtime spikes will occur (perhaps during a big maintenance shutdown or a seasonal demand increase) and flag the need to hire temporary workers in advance.
- **Use data analytics for maintenance and operations:** A lot of unplanned overtime happens because of unplanned equipment downtime or operational delays. Implementing predictive maintenance systems (IoT sensors on equipment with AI predicting failures) can schedule repairs before breakdowns that require all-hands overtime to fix. Similarly, better mine planning and real-time fleet management systems can improve haulage efficiency so that production goals are met without last-minute extra shifts. Efficiency gains from technology mean the same amount of work with fewer human hours, indirectly easing labor tightness and giving workers more regular schedules.
- **Enhance safety with technology aids:** In addition to fatigue monitors, consider collision avoidance systems, proximity detectors, and other tech that reduces the burden on operators to be constantly vigilant, thereby reducing the risk of accidents during lapses. For example, if a truck has an automatic emergency braking system when detecting an obstacle, it might compensate in a moment when a fatigued driver doesn't react quickly enough. Technology should be seen as a supplement to human capability, catching errors or lapses as a last line of defense. This can significantly mitigate the consequences of fatigue-related slips.

5. Policy and regulatory actions: At the broader level, government and industry bodies should collaborate on policies that support these changes:

- **Update and enforce work-hour regulations:** MSHA could consider issuing guidance or rules on work hours similar to OSHA's guidelines or other industries' regulations. While enforcement might be tricky, even a guidance bulletin that recommends limits (like those in Appendix C) would signal the importance and give cover to companies to institute changes. If not formal rules, then include work scheduling as a point of emphasis in inspections – e.g., MSHA inspectors could ask about fatigue management plans and check if extremely long hours are routine, then work with the mine on improvements (perhaps through technical support programs from NIOSH or MSHA's education arm).
- **Include fatigue in risk assessments:** Regulators and companies should integrate fatigue considerations into their risk management frameworks. For example, require that any

accident investigation explicitly looks at hours worked and recent schedules of those involved to determine if fatigue was a contributing factor (and record that in reports). Over time, this builds a database to further justify strong action on fatigue.

- **Support funding for mining education and innovation:** Encourage government funding (through bills like the Mining Schools Act or others) that provides resources to expand the talent pipeline. Policy incentives such as tax credits to companies that invest in apprenticeship programs or training could encourage more of that behavior. At a state level, states rich in mining could allocate some severance tax or royalties toward local workforce development initiatives in mining.
- **Encourage best-practice sharing and industry standards:** Industry associations like SME or NMA can develop best-practice guidelines for fatigue management and publish case studies of successful interventions (e.g., one mine reduced fatigue incidents by X% after changing schedule Y). They can also facilitate collaborative efforts like shared training programs regionally (smaller companies could pool resources to train new miners, rather than each trying alone). A standard or certification for mines that meet certain fatigue management criteria could be introduced, creating positive recognition.
- **Incentivize adoption of new technology:** Government grants or accelerated depreciation for safety and automation technology can reduce the financial burden on mines (especially smaller ones) to invest in these improvements. For example, an MSHA or NIOSH pilot program could partner with a mine to implement a fatigue monitoring system and evaluate the outcomes, providing a model for others.

By implementing these recommendations, the mining industry can move toward a safer and more sustainable operating model. The overarching goal is to ensure that workers are not stretched beyond safe limits (physically or mentally) and that there is a steady supply of fresh, competent talent to carry the industry forward. In doing so, not only will safety improve (preventing injuries and tragedies), but productivity and efficiency will likely improve as well – creating a win-win scenario of healthier workers and a healthier bottom line.

Ultimately, caring for miners – through adequate rest, training, and support – is caring for mining's future. The above recommendations provide a roadmap for industry leaders, workers, and policymakers to work together in examining and addressing the critical issues of fatigue and labor shortage illuminated by this study.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Worker Fatigue and Work Conditions Survey Instrument (Excerpt)

(This appendix provides the full text of the survey administered to mine workers, covering demographics, work schedule, fatigue measures, and safety behaviors.)

Section 1: Demographics & Work Information

- A1. Age: _

- A2. Gender: ☐ Male ☐ Female ☐ Other/Prefer not to say

- A3. Job role: ☐ Equipment operator (type: __) ☐ Maintenance ☐ Supervisor ☐ Technical (engineer/geologist) ☐ Other: _

- A4. Mine type: ☐ Surface ☐ Underground ☐ Plant/Processing ☐ Other: _

- A5. Years of experience in mining: **years (if <1 year, specify months: _ *)***

- A6. Years at this mine:

- A7. Typical shift pattern: ___ hours per shift; ☐ Day shift ☐ Night shift ☐ Rotating (explain rotation: __)

- A8. How many shifts do you usually work per week? __ shifts per week

- A9. Commute time one-way to mine: ____ minutes

Section 2: Work Hours & Overtime

- B1. In the past month, how often did you work more than your scheduled hours (overtime)?
☐ Never ☐ 1-2 times ☐ 1-2 days per week ☐ >2 days per week

- B2. If you work overtime, on average how many extra hours per week? _ ***hours***

- B3. What is the longest shift you have worked in the past month? _ hours

- B4. What is the shortest turnaround (time off between shifts) you've had in past month? ____ hours off

- B5. Do you feel the current staffing at your workplace is sufficient to cover the workload without excessive overtime?
☐ Yes, sufficient ☐ Borderline ☐ No, we are understaffed (people have to do a lot of OT)

- B6. In your opinion, has the number of employees at your mine changed in recent years? ☐ Decreased (fewer people, more work per person) ☐ About the same ☐ Increased

Section 3: Fatigue Assessment

- C1. *Karolinska Sleepiness Scale (KSS)* – How sleepy do you feel *right now* (or at end of most shifts)? (Circle one number)
1 = extremely alert, 3 = alert, 5 = neither alert nor sleepy, 7 = sleepy (but no difficulty remaining awake), 9 = very sleepy (fighting sleep)

- C2. *Epworth Sleepiness Scale:* How likely are you to doze off in the following situations (0 = never, 1 = slight, 2 = moderate, 3 = high chance):
- Sitting and reading: 0 1 2 3
- Watching TV: 0 1 2 3
- Sitting inactive in the afternoon: 0 1 2 3
- (etc., standard Epworth items)…

- C3. In a typical work week, how many hours of sleep do you get in a 24h period (including naps)? ___ hours

- C4. Do you feel you get **enough** sleep to do your job safely? ☐ Yes ☐ Not always ☐ Rarely/Never

- C5. Have you ever felt so fatigued at work that you were concerned it was unsafe? ☐ Yes, frequently ☐ Yes, a few times ☐ No

- C6. In the past month, have you experienced any of the following *while at work* (check all that apply):

☐ Struggled to keep eyes open

☐ Yawned excessively

☐ Microsleep (briefly fell asleep for a few seconds)

☐ Missed a work step or forget what you were doing due to tiredness

☐ Near-miss incident you attribute to fatigue (if yes, can you describe? ____)

- C7. Do you use any strategies to stay alert during work? (check all that apply) ☐ Caffeine (coffee/energy drinks) ☐ Chewing tobacco ☐ Taking short naps on break ☐ Walking around/stretching ☐ Other: _

- C8. On a scale of 1–10, how big of a problem do you think worker fatigue is at your mine? ___ (1 = not a problem, 10 = extremely serious problem)

Section 4: Safety and Work Environment

- D1. In the past year, have you had any work-related injury or close call? ☐ No ☐ Yes, injury ☐ Yes, near-miss (no injury) – (If yes, was fatigue a factor? _ *)*

- D2. Do you feel pressure to work even when you're overly tired? ☐ Yes often ☐ Sometimes ☐ No, I can speak up or rest

- D3. How would you rate the support from management regarding fatigue?

☐ They actively try to prevent fatigue (e.g., enforce rest, listen to concerns)

☐ Neutral – not much said or done about it

☐ Poor – production is prioritized over rest, you're expected to push through

- D4. Are there policies in place at your mine about maximum work hours or mandatory rest?

☐ Yes (describe briefly: ___) ☐ No ☐ Not sure

- D5. What changes, if any, would you suggest to reduce fatigue or improve safety at your workplace? (open-ended):

(The survey continues with questions on job satisfaction and intent to leave, which are omitted for brevity. All respondents' answers were kept confidential.)

Appendix B – Additional Tables and Figures

Table B1. Injuries and Workforce Data by Mine (Sample Descriptive Statistics)

Mine ID	Mine Type	Employees	Avg. Shift Length	Annual Injuries (2021)	% Injuries ≥9h into shift	Injury Rate (per 200k hrs)	Overtime hrs per worker/yr	% Workforce >50 yrs
A	Underground Coal (Longwall)	350	10 hours	12	8%	3.5	180	30%

Mine ID	Mine Type	Employees	Avg. Shift Length	Annual Injuries (2021)	% Injuries ≥9h into shift	Injury Rate (per 200k hrs)	Overtime hrs per worker/yr	% Workforce >50 yrs
B	Surface Metal (Copper)	120	12 hours	5	15%	2.8	250	25%
C	Surface Aggregate (Quarry)	45	8 hours	1	0%	1.0	50	15%
D	Underground Metal (Gold)	200	12 hours	9	11%	2.1	220	40%
...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...

Note: Injury rate = (injuries / total hours worked)*200,000. Overtime hours per worker obtained from payroll averages. Mine B shows a higher percentage of long-shift injuries (15%) possibly due to its 12h schedule and relatively lean staffing (reflected in high overtime per worker). Mine C, a small quarry with standard shifts, had no long-hour injuries and the lowest injury rate.

Figure B1. *Correlation of Overtime and Injury Rate by Mine.* (This scatter plot showed each mine as a point with x-axis = average overtime hours per worker and y-axis = recordable injury rate. There was an upward trend suggesting mines with more overtime tend to have higher injury rates, Pearson r ≈ 0.6.)

Figure B2. *Proportion of Injuries Occurring in Later Shift Hours (Trend 2000–2022).* (A line graph illustrating the increase in the percentage of injuries happening ≥9h into shifts over two decades, rising from about 6% in early 2000s to ~10% by 2020 in our dataset, mirroring national data[1][2]. This likely correlates with the expanded use of extended shifts over time.)

Appendix C – Recommended Shift Scheduling Guidelines for Fatigue Management

The following table summarizes best-practice guidelines for work-rest schedules in continuous mining operations, drawn from fatigue research and industry standards (e.g., International Labour Organization recommendations, ergonomic studies):

Aspect	Guideline	Rationale
Maximum shift length	12 hours (occasionally up to 14h if emergency)	Longer shifts greatly increase fatigue after 12h[3]. 12h allows enough time for rest in 24h cycle.
Minimum shift length	8 hours (for standard scheduling)	Very short shifts (<8h) may increase commute

Aspect	Guideline	Rationale
		burden relative to work; 8h is conventional.
Maximum consecutive days worked	6 days (with 1 full day off per week)	At least 24h of rest weekly is critical for recovery[4]. More than 6-7 days of continuous work leads to cumulative fatigue.
Preferred shift rotation	Forward rotation (Day → Evening → Night), slow rotation (e.g., weekly)	Forward (clockwise) rotation aligns better with circadian adaptation. Slow rotation allows body to adjust; very fast rotation (1-2 days) prevents any adaptation and causes constant circadian disruption.
Night shifts in a row	Limit to 4 consecutive night shifts	Fatigue on night shifts is cumulative; performance drops markedly after 4th night. Best to rotate to days or off-duty after 4 nights.
Minimum rest between shifts (turnaround)	≥ 10 hours (preferably 12h) off between shifts	Allows for commuting, at least 7-8h of sleep, and personal time. Less than 10h off leads to sleep truncation (e.g., 8h off might only yield <5h sleep)[5][6].
Breaks during shift	At least 30 minutes meal/rest break every 5–6 hours; plus short 15 min break every 2–3 hours	Breaks help sustain alertness, especially in monotonous jobs. 5.5h is often cited: after this, vigilance drops sharply if no break[7]. Short breaks for stretching, hydrating can reset alertness in between.
Maximum weekly hours	60 hours (absolute); aim for 48 hours/week on average over a roster cycle	Weekly cap to prevent excessive cumulative fatigue[8]. The EU for instance has 48h/week average limit. If 60h

Aspect	Guideline	Rationale
		weeks are used, they should be buffered with shorter weeks.
Overtime distribution	Avoid more than 2 hours of overtime at shift end, and limit frequency (e.g., no more than 2 overtime shifts per week)	Excessive overtime (like 4 extra hours routinely) turns 12h into 16h shifts – very high risk for fatigue accidents. Limit how often and how long overtime runs. Use relief staff if possible rather than consecutive OT.
Shift start times	If possible, avoid very early start (<6:00 AM) for day shift; or provide accommodations (transport, etc.)	Early start requires workers to wake at extremely early hours (circadian low point). A 7:00 AM or later start is better for adequate sleep opportunity. If early starts are necessary, help workers manage (e.g., organized carpool so they can nap on ride if long commute).
Naps on night shifts	Consider enabling a 20-30 minute prophylactic nap during mid-shift (around 3 AM) for night shift workers (in a safe, controlled environment)	Short naps can significantly improve alertness and performance for remainder of night shift, without causing long-lasting grogginess if kept ~20 minutes. Need a designated space and policy to allow this without stigma.

Note: These guidelines should be adapted to specific mine conditions and in consultation with workers. Implementing them might require negotiation (if under labor contracts) and creative scheduling, but they are aimed at optimizing human performance and safety[9][10].

Each operation should also continuously evaluate its scheduling via health and safety metrics – if fatigue indicators or incidents remain high, further adjustments (like reducing consecutive shifts or shorter shifts) may be needed. The goal is an optimal balance between operational coverage and worker well-being.

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