

KTPalmer et al. *Scandinavian Journal of Work, Environment and Health*. Feb (2001) Vol.27 #1 p.49.

A study of the prevalence and occupational associations of neck pain in the British population. 21201 subjects aged 16-64 were mailed at random. In addition 993 armed forces personnel were contacted.

All were asked to complete questionnaires aimed at eliciting relevant information on; occupation, work activities, neck pain in the past week/year, headaches, tiredness and stress.

Prevalence Ratios (PR) used to indicate associations.  $PR > 1$  indicates a positive association.

There were 12,907 respondents (61%).

4,348 and 2,528 reported neck pain in the last year/week respectively.

1,421 (11%) reported pain interfering with normal activities.

Little variation with occupation/unemployment, though reports were more common among women, smokers and the unemployed.

Work with arms above shoulder height  $PR = 1.3$  to  $1.7$ , women, and  $1.2$  to  $1.4$ , men.

No associations for typing, lifting, use of vibratory tools, professional driving.

But, associations with frequent headaches ( $PR\ 2.3 - 2.8$ ) and stress ( $PR\ 2.2 - 2.5$ ) were found.

A high proportion of people who report neck pain also report pains in other parts of the body.

#### Comment

No strong association was found with physical activity whether vigorous or office based. Study design suggests low bias, though participation rates leave some doubt about this. There may also have been some bias in the self-assessment of occupational exposure.

The combination of findings of widespread pain and stress suggest that psychosocial rather than physical factors are more useful explanatory variables. A cross sectional study (like this one) cannot indicate the causal direction of this association.

Further studies of particular work groups should be able to refer to the findings of this study as a baseline.

