HJCG Coury et al. International Journal of Industrial Ergonomics (2002) Vol. 29 p.33.

Some authors have proposed that women workers are particularly vulnerable to DRSI. It might therefore be supposed that replacing women workers with men, should reduce the incidence of complaints. This study examined the effect of changing the gender mix at work.

The 103 workers (84 female and 19 male) had ages ranging from 18 to 54 yr. This was the entire workforce of a highly active product-sorting task.

Sick leave history was researched and physical examination was provided for all those who reported pains lasting more than 3 consecutive days. More than 30% of the workforce had taken some time off work, stating musculoskeletal disorders as the reason. Two years before the study, the employer had begun to replace women with men in an attempt to control sickness absence levels. None of the staff at that time had any musculoskeletal complaints.

The frequency of motions was about 17,000 motions over an 8 h shift. The mean forces applied when pinching one small-size object was 1.3 lb (8%of the MVC).

81% reported pain lasting more than 3 days in the previous year and 30% had taken time of work.

Gender made a significant contribution to the presence of symptoms and taking of sick leave. The biggest single contribution was tenure, the longer employed the more likely to take sick leave.

Comment

The results provide moderate confirmation of the vulnerability of women to upper limb symptoms and sick leave. Other factors, such as employment history and weight of material to be handled were more influential than gender.
Gender is not, by itself, an explanatory variable for problems with upper limb symptoms.

Results were not controlled for spouse employment, or age and number of offspring; traditional influences on sick leave.

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