

MSD Risk Factors

M.Hakkanen et al. Occupational and Environmental Medicine (2001) Vol.58 #2 p.129.

A longitudinal study performed over three years and involving over 500 assembly workers at one site during a period of rapid growth. During the three years of the study 372 new workers were recruited providing an opportunity to test the effect of work on changes in musculoskeletal health.

People with a history of MSD were excluded from assembly work. Specific diagnoses were made by an Occupational Physician and included tenosynovitis, peritendinitis and epicondylitis. Sickness absence was also recorded. Work was assessed by an ergonomists. Experienced and new workers did the same work

Results show that the most significant risk factor for absence with arm, neck and shoulder disorders is age: Age 30-40 Risk Ratio = 2.9 (95% confidence interval 1.2 to 7.1). Interestingly the data seems to show that high load was protective.

Comment

The lack of support for the usual ergonomic risk factor parameters confirms the difficulty of making risk assessments for specific outcomes. In our view there is more support for these parameters where the outcome of interest is comfort.

A similar (but higher quality) study is soon to be reported in the UK.
