

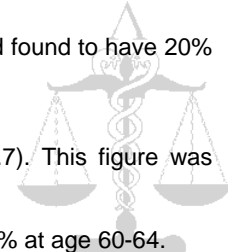
S Bergman et al Journal of Rheumatology. June (2001) Vol. 28 #6 p 1369.

A study of the prevalence and risk factors for chronic pain in Sweden. Distinction was made between chronic widespread pain, a feature of arthritis for example, and chronic regional pain, a feature of low back pain or Diffuse RSI.

3928 postal questionnaires were sent to adults on the west coast of Sweden, with a minimum of pre-selection.

2755 people responded. A small proportion of non-responders were followed up and found to have 20% prevalence. That is, people in pain were more likely to respond to the questionnaire.

Chronic pain was defined as being of more than 3 months duration.
989 people reported chronic musculoskeletal pain (34.5%) (95% CI = 32.3 to 36.7). This figure was made up from 38.3% women 30.9% men.



Prevalence of chronic pain increased with age, for example, 17% at age 20-24 to 50% at age 60-64.

Chronic Widespread Pain and Chronic Regional pain were distinctly different. There were almost no chronic widespread pain cases at ages 20-24 but 10% and 25% for men and women at 60-64. Chronic regional pain was equally distributed between the sexes at ages 60-64 - 27%.

Comment

Self reported chronic pain is highly prevalent. Employers should have an expectation that a significant proportion of their work force will be in pain regardless of conditions at work. Their concern may therefore be to ensure that work for those in pain remains a viable option. The report does not show that work was a cause of this pain or that work was responsible for the general increase in prevalence with age.

It is interesting to speculate that regional pain appears to develop into widespread pain as age increases. However this conclusion requires confirmation by longitudinal study.