

PARTICIPATORY ERGONOMICS: WORKING WITH ORGANISATIONS TO REDUCE MUSCULOSKELETAL DISORDERS IN BUSINESS DRIVERS.

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Musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) are a leading cause of sickness absence in the UK. Those who drive cars as part of their job are at risk, particularly, those who drive for 20 hours per week or more. In addition, the car is increasingly being used as a mobile office, with associated health risks. Recent research has revealed that within a sample of business drivers, 65% reported low back trouble, suggesting there is a need to develop interventions to reduce business drivers' risk of developing MSDs.

Three large organisations took part in a participatory ergonomics study. All the drivers in the sample were sales people (or equivalent) with high exposure to driving cars as part of their job i.e. >25,000 miles/year or >20h/week. Drivers of other vehicles and those who had less exposure than this were excluded from the sample. The efficacy of intervention strategies was assessed using a questionnaire distributed to drivers from the participating organisations who met the inclusion criteria. Data were collected on factors affecting absenteeism: MSD prevalence and psychosocial factors. The questionnaire assessed driver Stage of Change in relation to MSDs to ensure that interventions were tailored to the needs of the organisation. The questionnaire was piloted and refined to ensure that the measure was clear and took no longer than 15 minutes to complete.

Semi-structured interviews were also conducted with between 6 - 10 key stakeholders in each organisation to explore their understanding of driving ergonomics, car choice, driver health, work tasks, Stage of Change and intervention strategies. Observational studies were carried out with 5 - 8 drivers within each organisation. Drivers were observed undertaking typical daily duties, for example removing equipment from the car and carrying into their place of work.

Preliminary findings suggest that, the majority of car drivers use their cars as an office. Manual handling was also a significant component of many drivers' work, with equipment ranging from 2.7 -15 kg in weight. Many of the drivers carried 2 or 3 pieces of equipment at one time from the boot of the car to their place of work. While risk assessments and manual handling training were conducted for plant operatives, no specific training was available for their car drivers. It appears that, both organisations and their employees, urgently need specific guidance on working from the car, for example, manual handling in/out of the car boot. Assessing Stage of Change revealed the majority of drivers to be pre-contemplative, suggesting the need for a publicity campaign to raise awareness of the risk factors associated with business drivers. Strategies for this are currently being co-developed with the participating organisations.

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