



The 130th Annual Meeting of APHA

4062.0: Tuesday, November 12, 2002 - Board 3

Abstract #49479

Job Stress, Hypertension and Cardiovascular Disease Risk among Autoworkers

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The labor/management health and safety committee of a major automaker has funded the first study of job stress, hypertension, and cardiovascular disease (CVD) risk among U.S. autoworkers. CVD is the number one cause of death in the U.S. and hypertension is a widespread and strong risk factor for CVD. Stressful features of work organization have been identified as important risk factors for hypertension and CVD. This study involves the analysis of existing company data on stress-related illnesses, as well as a shop-floor investigation of sources of stress in the workplace and blood pressure (BP) levels of employees.

First, sickness absence, disability and workers' compensation claim data from 1996-2001 for hypertension, CVD, and psychological disorders will be analyzed. Rates of claims, adjusted by age and gender, will be presented by company facility and job category (e.g., production, skilled trades, clerical/technical, professional/managerial), in order to identify high-risk facilities and job categories.

Second, a questionnaire to assess job stressors, work organization, and health conditions will be developed in consultation with labor and management representatives and employees. Employees' BP will be measured while they are working ("work site point estimate method"), to provide a more reliable and valid measure of daytime BP than the standard technique of measuring BP in a doctor's office. Data on the association between stressors (as measured by the questionnaire) and workplace BP will not be available by November, 2002. However, the innovative BP measurement technique, and qualitative data on sources of stress in the work environment will be described.

Learning Objectives:

- Participants will learn techniques for
 - a) analyzing company health data in order to identify high risk facilities and job titles; b) measuring blood pressure while employees are working; c) assessing job stressors through questionnaires and interviews.
- As a result, participants will be able to develop a surveillance program in their own workplaces to help identify work stress-related illnesses.
- At the conclusion of the session, participants will be able to develop a strategy for analyzing existing health data in their workplaces; assess methods for measuring employees' blood pressure while they are working; and evaluate various generic and workplace specific

questions and scales to measure work stressors and work organization.

Keywords: Occupational Health Programs, Occupational Disease

Presenting author's disclosure statement:

I do not have any significant financial interest/arrangement or affiliation with any organization/institution whose products or services are being discussed in this session.

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