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Occupational hearing loss in a population based survey of US minority farm operators

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Adjusted prevalence of hearing loss in farm operators is 36% compared to 18% in police and fire fighters and 26% in construction laborers.¹ Data on minority populations were limited. A population-based survey of 7,167 farm operators was conducted in 2000 with over-sampling of minority, Hispanic, and female operators. Participants whose doctors attributed their hearing loss to infection, ear surgery, birth defect, or ear injury (n=198) were excluded from analyses. Prevalences were adjusted for age, education, smoking, and years of farm and non-farm work. Hearing loss, including deafness in one or both ears, tinnitus, or hearing trouble, is significantly less prevalent in African American farm operators (men 17%, women 14%), and Asian-American men (25%), compared to white operators (men 32%, women 23%) of the same gender. Additionally, prevalence of hearing loss was lower among Hispanic men (26%) than non-Hispanic white men (32%). Generally, white non-Hispanic male operators had a higher raw prevalence, and greater mean years of lifetime use of noisy farm equipment than did other racial and ethnic groups. Prevalence of noisy farm equipment use varied from 54% in Asian-American women to 96% in white men. Use of noisy farm equipment was significantly related to hearing loss (OR=1.76, 95%CI 1.03–3.00) after adjustment for non-farm noise exposure (e.g. motorcycles, guns), other work, and demographic variables. Detailed data on use of hearing protection and specific hearing outcomes will be presented. These results stress the importance of increasing efforts to reduce hearing loss among farm operators with attention to cultural differences.

Learning Objectives: 1. Discuss the prevalence of hearing loss experienced by farm operators. 2. Describe racial and ethnic differences in hearing loss of farm operators. 3. Identify risk factors for hearing loss among farm operators.

Keywords: Minority Health, Latin American

Related Web page:

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