

PULSE

RSI placing a strain on workplace

In 2000/01, 10% of Canadians aged 20 or older reported having a repetitive strain injury (RSI) in the previous 12 months that was serious enough to limit their usual activities, the Canadian Community Health and the National Population Health surveys indicate.

Of respondents reporting RSIs, 55% indicated that they had resulted from activities at work, while 20% cited sports or physical exercise as the source. Of those reporting an RSI, 25% indicated it was in their neck or shoulders, while 23% said the wrist or hand, 19% the upper or lower back, and 16% the elbow or lower arm.

Prevalence was highest among those aged 40 to 49 (13.1%) and lowest for those 70 years or older (3.3%). Men and women were equally likely to report an injury.

Prevalence was highest among those working in the processing, manufacturing and utilities fields, or in the trades, transport or equipment-operating sectors, where incidence rates were more than 13%. Those in the management category had the lowest rate, 10.1%.

Stress in the workplace appears to affect incidence rates, especially for women. Women who indicated that their work is “not at all/not very stressful” had a prevalence rate of 10.4%, compared with 18.4% for those whose work is “extremely stressful.” After controlling for other factors, work-related stress was not significantly associated with RSIs for men. For women, a relationship between incidence of RSIs and work-related stress remained after other factors were considered.

Stress levels outside work also affected RSI rates. Women whose lives were “not at all/not very stressful” had a 7.5% prevalence rate, whereas those who felt their lives were “extremely stressful” had a 17.5% rate. The rates for men were 7.3% and 14%, respectively. The relationship between life stress and RSIs continued to exist for both sexes, even after adjusting for other factors. — *Tara S. Chaubhan*, Project Manager, Research, Policy and Planning, CMA

