

## **Physical and psychosocial risk factors at work in relation to (sickness absence due to) musculoskeletal symptoms; is there a gender difference?**

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Many studies have reported higher prevalences of (sickness absenteeism due to) musculoskeletal symptoms for women. One explanation is that exposure to a factor might have a larger effect on women than on men. The objective of this study is to determine whether there are gender differences in the effect of exposure to work-related physical and psychosocial risk factors and (sickness absenteeism due to) low back, neck, shoulder or hand-arm symptoms. Data a prospective cohort (SMASH) with a follow-up period of 3 years was used. Exposure to risk factors and musculoskeletal symptoms were assessed using questionnaires. Sickness absenteeism was registered continuously. Gender ratios (GR) were calculated to determine differences in effect. Gender ratios higher than 1.25 (women having a higher risk) or lower than 0.75 (men having a higher risk) were regarded as relevant. Except for bending the wrist and bending the neck backwards (GR 1.52-2.55) men generally had a higher risk of symptoms (GR 0.50-0.75). For absenteeism a GR >1.25 was found for twisting the upper body, working in uncomfortable postures, twisting the wrist, bending the neck backwards, coworker and supervisor support (GR 1.29-2.63). For driving vehicles, hand-arm vibration, squeezing, working above shoulder or below knee level, reaching, twisting the neck, job demands and skill discretion the GR was <0.75. It was expected that women would be more vulnerable to exposure to work-related risk factors. As the results show that in many cases men are more vulnerable this study could not explain the gender difference in musculoskeletal symptoms.