Reviewer's report

Title: Risk factors for neck pain among forklift truck operators. A retrospective cohort study.

Version: 0 Date: 10 Jul 2017

Reviewer: K Walker-Bone

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The authors present a study comparing the prevalence of neck pain 'ever' among workers in warehouses. The two main occupational groups are fork-lift truck operators and office workers. There are a number of important issues about this study design:

1) 41% of the office workers had previously been forklift operators in the same warehouse. This seems extraordinarily high and, even with the analyses presented in Table 3 attempting to adjust for years of exposure, fail to convince this reviewer that this is a true case-control comparison.

2) Response rates were low. It is unclear what was communicated to workers about the means/purposes of the research or whether the workers perceived that the research might impact in some way on their employment. This may well have biased responses.

3) Neck/shoulder disorders commonly overlap, as discussed in the Introduction and Discussion. For these analyses, shoulder pain is treated as a risk factor (which is significant) but it would be really useful to re-analyse the data combining neck and shoulder pain to see what the risk factor profile look like when they are combined.

4) Three outcomes are discussed: neck pain ever; neck pain in the last 7 days and sick leave attributed to neck pain. Subsequently, results are presented for 'neck pain prevalence' and I assume that the outcome in these analyses is 'neck pain ever'? It would strengthen the manuscript if the analyses with all three outcomes were at least discussed. Without any mention of these, this reviewer suspects that the same associations were not shown?

5) The authors postulate a 'healthy worker effect' that acts differently between their groups, postulating that the forklift truck drivers are forced to stop these jobs due to their neck pain. Can they provide any results to support these assertions? Given that so many of the
office workers seem to have stayed at the warehouse after operating the forklifts in the past, is this really the case? It would be so much cleaner to compare those NEVER exposed to forklift driving with those with say at least 2 years of exposure?

6) I am surprised that the respondents in both occupational groups report such wide variation in exposure to e.g. sitting. Were they actually doing very different work?

7) In the Discussion, the importance of 'previous neck pain' as a risk factor for neck pain is reported. I cannot see any clear indication that these results were adjusted for previous neck pain or pain at any site?

**Are the methods appropriate and well described?**
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.
No

**Does the work include the necessary controls?**
If not, please specify which controls are required in your comments to the authors.
No

**Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?**
If not, please explain in your comments to the authors.
No

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