Reviewer’s report

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

Version: 0 Date: 02 Aug 2017

Reviewer: Anna Grimby-Ekman

Reviewer's report:
Reviiwer comments from AGE on "Risk factors for neck pain among forklifting truck operators"

Major revisions

1. In title, and also in the text in the manuscript, it need to be written clearer whether "neck pain" is referring to "having neck pain" or " developing neck pain".

2. The questionnaire: Describe what time span the questions ask about. How is time referred to in the questions?

3. The outcome variable "neck pain" needs to be defined in the methods section, preferably at line 28 after the "study population" section. Deleting the individuals who had neck pain before employment should be described in connection to this (now comes later).

4. Where there information on the time for onset of neck pain for the 18 office workers that were previously fork lifting operators? Were the onset before or after they became office workers and how was their exposure time calculated?

5. The issue or risk for bias due to many office workers previously being fork lifting operators need to be both discussed more thoroughly and also addressed with complementary analysis.

Statistics (line 24): There is no justification mentions why the univariate tests are done, presented in Table 1. These kind of "Table 1 tests" are not recommended. See STROBE comment (*at the very end of these comments), specifically see Strengthening the Reporting of Observational Studies in Epidemiology (STROBE): Explanation and Elaboration, Vandenbroucke et al., Plos One. A relevant citation from this article is as follows:

"Inferential measures such as standard errors and confidence intervals should not be used to describe the variability of characteristics, and significance tests should be avoided in descriptive
tables. Also, P values are not an appropriate criterion for selecting which confounders to adjust for in analysis; even small differences in a confounder that has a strong effect on the outcome can be important [144,145].

In cohort studies, it may be useful to document how an exposure relates to other characteristics and potential confounders. Authors could present this information in a table with columns for participants in two or more exposure categories, which permits to judge the differences in confounders between these categories."

6. Statistics (line 53): "person years" is mentioned, how is the person years for one individual calculated, is there no censuring …? Describe this under the outcome section or at its current position in the statistics section.

7. If there are censuring the correct analysis would be survival analysis (Cox regression) rather than Poisson regression.

8. All risk factors presented in the result section should be described in the section "Exposure and risk factors". Now this is done in a general manner.

9. References to validation and reliability studies of the questions used in the questionnaire should be added.

10. At the end of the statistics section (line 14-): Add comment on collinearity checks between factors (exposures, risk factors and confounders). How they were performed and what the result was.

Age and exposure time are probably correlated, but how strongly?

11. Mention if any variables were considered to be confounders. Remember that confounder are not to be interpreted as risk factors.

12. Is it possible to do a drop-out analysis? Even if not, discuss this in more detail in the discussion.

13. Sample size needs also to be discussed as this is a quite small sample for an epidemiological study.
Minor revisions

1. Background in the abstract (line 11): The number of fork lift operators might not be the most important justification for this study, but that this quite common occupation represents long-term exposure to non-neutral strenuous neck-positions.

2. Statistics (2nd page, line 5): The term incidence rate ratios (IRR) is used. Define this term in detail, as the terminology in epidemiological is not consistent and terms can have several meanings.

3. Results (3rd page of results, line 1): The sentence "There was no significant correlation …" is more correct if phrased "There was no statistically significant association …"

4. Same page on line 39-44: Rewrite this sentences.

5. Discussion (2nd page, line 19-): Surprising that the author did not find any studies on office workers or similar groups were factors as stress, social support or hour with computer work were found to be risk factors. Could be other references of interest that are relevant to mention.


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.

Unable to assess

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?
If not, please explain in your comments to the authors.

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Are you able to assess any statistics in the manuscript or would you recommend an additional statistical review?
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