Women and the ageing workforce: implications for occupational safety and health

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EU-OSHA:

- An information Agency of the European Union
  - Scientific, technical, economic, good practice cases, tools
  - Analysis

- Management Board
- National Focal Points
Older workers in Europe and OSH

- Will have to work longer
  - more exposure to OSH risks
- Will represent a greater proportion of the workforce
  - less younger workers to do the heaviest work
- Half of those aged 55-64 leave work before obligatory retirement age
  - many for work-related health reasons
EU-OSHA Project – Safer and Healthier Work at Any Age: OSH in the context of an aging workforce: conclusions

- Improved prevention for all taking a life-cycle approach
- Specific measures for older workers
  - If and when necessary – depending on type of work, individual..
  - Avoiding stigmatization
- Support for small businesses
- Holistic approach
- Integrated policy and services:
  - OSH, employment, public health, social security.
  - Workplace- human resources, finance management…
Gender, age, occupational safety and health review

Men and women

- Different age-related challenges
- Sex- and gender-related differences in working conditions persist throughout the working life

- Must identify and understand differences to inform policy
Don’t underestimate the cumulative physical and emotional impacts of women’s work

- Men and women in elementary jobs more likely to report not being able to do current job until 60
- Musculoskeletal disorders / physical work
  - Extent and need for reduction more recognised in male manual work
- Emotionally demanding work
- Increase attention to work-related stress and musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs), in general and in women’s work
Sustainable work in a small kindergarten, Denmark
- Reducing MSDs, retaining experienced workers

What was done
- Hydraulic, height-adjustable changing tables and chairs
- Individual advice
- Fathers move furniture for meetings
- Working time adjustment
- Low price exercise and physiotherapy

Enabling factors
- Older workers valued
- Range of measures
- External support
- Prevention for all, adjustments as necessary, early intervention
- Worker involvement
Flexible working and family carers

• More demanding than child care
• Less gender difference but majority of caring by women over 50
• Some workers do both!
• Flexible working aimed at childcare by women
• Extend and adapt schemes to cover all carers
Working through the menopause

- Still a taboo in society and workplace
- Simple non-stigmatising measures in the workplace include
  - Access to drinking water
  - Layered clothing for uniforms
  - Flexible working e.g to facilitate doctor’s appointments
- Advice and awareness-raising needed
Long periods in low-level jobs, without career promotion, can lead to long-term exposure to hazards

French printing company

- Older women working in ‘finishing’ – high absenteeism from musculoskeletal disorders

⇒ ‘Standard’ ergonomic solutions e.g. alter workstations to avoid poor postures & repetitive tasks

- Women ‘trapped’ in finishing work, men quickly promoted – longer exposure to poor conditions

⇒ Recommendations concerning career paths and skills recognition
Integrate age and gender into risk assessment

Bring actions together:
- Explicitly include diversity (age, gender,) in risk assessment
- Explicitly include OSH in workplace equality actions -gender, age, disability

Some principles
- Improve prevention for all: 1.eliminate risks at source
- Adapt work to workers
- Avoid assumptions, consider everyone
- Take account of individual differences
- Look at real work done
- Consult women, older workers
- Diversity training
- Seek advice when necessary
Labour inspectorates should have clear diversity strategies

- Labour Inspections need to systematically mainstream diversity into their strategy and activities

- Austria Labour Inspection
  - Training and inspection checklists for inspectors
  - Diversity included in campaigns, guides
  - Tools for SMEs e.g. workforce age projection
  - Gender and diversity impact assessments
  - Covers inspectors’ employment conditions
Women and rehabilitation

- Effective rehabilitation part of sustainable work
  - early intervention; focus on staying in work – treatment goal; tailored, coordinated multidisciplinary support

- Work-relatedness of illness needs recognising to enter some occupational rehabilitation programmes
  - may be less recognised in women workers
  - Issue for occupational health and public health

- Programmes need to be accessible
  - suitable times and tailored to women

- Access to occupational health services for early detection
Final messages

- Bring together occupational safety and health, age equality and gender equality in policy and practice

- Occupational safety and health, gender and ageing: more research, more action
Coming soon - 2020-22….

- European Healthy Workplaces campaign on campaign musculoskeletal disorders

- Resources will include:
  - Advice for workplaces on accommodating workers with chronic musculoskeletal health problems

http://osha.europa.eu
Thank you

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European Parliament older worker project:

Also see EU-OSHA webpages on
Age and work
Gender and work