

Almost two-thirds of pregnant women believe they are regularly exposed to physical risk at work

December 17 2009



Spanish legislation governing the protection of pregnant women at work since 1995. Credit: Menno Hordijk (Creative Commons / Attribution no derivatives).

A new study shows the employment and sociodemographic characteristics involved in the exposure of pregnant women to workplace hazards. Of these, 56% say they often work standing up or have to lift heavy objects, 63% are exposed to workplace stress and 62% say they are frequently exposed to some physical risk in their place of work.

"Pregnant and breastfeeding [women](#) are especially sensitive to exposure

to workplace hazards", M^a Carmen González, lead author of the study and a researcher at the Higher Centre for Public Health Research in Valencia, tells SINC. "Certain workplace pollutants and working conditions can have negative impacts on pregnancy and the development of the foetus", she says.

The results of this study, recently published in the journal *Gaceta Sanitaria*, show that more than half of the women (56%) worked standing up or frequently lifted heavy objects during the course of their paid work while pregnant.

In addition, 63% said they were subjected to workplace stress, and 62% frequently experienced some physical risk - noise, high temperatures or humidity, vibrations, radiation and electromagnetic fields (data visualisation screens).

Almost one-quarter of the women (22%) said they were exposed to some chemical agent, particularly cleaning products, and 6% to biological risk factors, such as in jobs involving the care of others.

The conclusions show that it is the youngest, least-educated and non-Spanish women, who are self-employed or working on temporary contracts, who are most likely to report being frequently exposed to workplace risks.

"This research could be useful for planning and prioritising the preventive actions necessary to protect the reproductive health of pregnant working women", explains González.

Spain, far from fulfilling its protection regulations

To date there has been no rigorous information about the exposure of [pregnant women](#) to workplace risks in Spain. The National Labour Force

Survey, the leading source of information on exposure to workplace hazards, does not include information about pregnant women.

However, when the authors compared some indicators on exposure to workplace hazards in this survey with those used in their own study, they found similar results.

"Although Spanish legislation regulates the protection of pregnant or [breastfeeding](#) women in their places of work (Law 31/1995 and Organic Law 3/2007), the conclusions of this study indicate that this legislation is insufficiently implemented in Spain", concludes the Valencian researcher.

More information: M. Carmen González-Galarzo, Ana M. García, Marisa Estarlich, Francisco García García, Ana Esplugues, Paz Rodríguez, Marisa Rebagliato, Ferran Ballester. "Prevalencias de exposición a riesgos laborales en trabajadoras embarazadas (proyecto INMA- Valencia)". Gaceta Sanitaria; 23 (5):420-6, Sept 2009.

Provided by FECYT - Spanish Foundation for Science and Technology

Citation: Almost two-thirds of pregnant women believe they are regularly exposed to physical risk at work (2009, December 17) retrieved 5 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2009-12-two-thirds-pregnant-women-regularly-exposed.html>

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