

Truck driver pain and discomfort can be alleviated

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Almost 60 per cent of truck drivers in a recent Canadian study reported

experiencing musculoskeletal (MSD) pain and discomfort on the job, even though it may be preventable.

"Given the fact that MSDs account for nearly one-half of all work-related illnesses and the transportation sector makes up a significant portion of that, understanding the risk factors associated with [musculoskeletal disorders](#) is important," said lead author Sonja Senthanar, a doctoral candidate in the School of Public Health and Health Systems. "While the link between trucking and MSDs has been studied in other countries, there is a dearth of research in Canada."

According to the Ontario Ministry of Transportation, truck driving is the second most common occupation in Canada, employing nearly one in 35 males between the ages of 20 and 64 years (check).

Public health researchers at the University of Waterloo surveyed 107 male truck drivers passing through two popular highway stops in Southern Ontario and found that 57 per cent had experienced musculoskeletal pain and discomfort, especially low back pain. They found an association between this pain and discomfort and specific risk factors, including organizational safety climate, level of risk associated with the job, exhaustion from work tasks, being married and having higher education levels.

Senthanar said that being married and more educated are presumably associated with [pain](#) and discomfort because the presence of a spouse and knowledge gained from education can increase awareness of [musculoskeletal](#) symptoms—and therefore rates of reporting.

Co-author Philip Bigelow, a professor in the School of Public Health and Health Systems, said, "Physical exposures such as awkward postures, repetition, lifting, whole body vibration and prolonged sitting, as well as personal factors such as physical fitness and job satisfaction, are known

to be associated with the development of MSDs. Since driving a truck involves a variety of these [risk factors](#), programs that address these multiple factors are needed."

Bigelow said that a number of large Canadian carriers have adopted programs that take holistic approaches that include reducing vibration exposures through improved seating, modifying workloads and physical tasks, as well as promoting the overall wellness of drivers by encouraging physical activity and healthy eating.

Researchers at the University of Waterloo are members of a Canadian team of researchers that is engaged with stakeholders in the industry to identify such wholistic programs and to evaluate their impacts. They hope that companies with successful programs can act as champions of driver health and wellness to improve working conditions for all truck drivers.

The research paper, "Factors associated with [musculoskeletal pain](#) and discomfort among Canadian [truck drivers](#): A cross-sectional study of worker perspectives," was published in the *Journal of Transport and Health* by Senthanaar and Bigelow, who also works at UWaterloo's Centre of Research Expertise for the Prevention of Musculoskeletal Disorders (CRE-MSD).

More information: Sonja Senthanaar et al, Factors associated with musculoskeletal pain and discomfort among Canadian truck drivers: A cross-sectional study of worker perspectives, *Journal of Transport & Health* (2018). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jth.2018.08.013](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jth.2018.08.013)

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