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Author: **Ann Patmalnieks**

## **Researchers recommend reducing hotel housekeepers' pace of work**

According to a new study by the Department of Occupational and Environmental Medicine at the University of Lund in southern Sweden, hotel housekeeping staff are at great risk of developing strain injuries. Their job involves lifting heavier loads than many jobs in industry, commerce and healthcare, and the researchers are now recommending a reduction in housekeepers' pace of work, so that they will be expected to clean fewer rooms per day of work.

### **Strenuous**

Very heavy strain on upper body:

- ★ pace of movement
- ★ work postures
- ★ muscle exertion

### **Arduous**

Excessive strain in relation to:

- ★ forward bending of head
- ★ work posture of upper arms
- ★ strain on lower arm muscles

### **Hazardous work pace**

- ★ excessively fast upper arm movement
- ★ excessively fast wrist movement
- ★ insufficient rest for lower arm muscles



Measurements were made during work.

Photograph: Occupation and Environmental Medicine South

Sophisticated equipment was used to determine how heavy the work of housekeepers really is. It turned out that on nine out of eleven points their work was so strenuous that action needs to be taken. There was too much strain on the housekeepers' muscles, and they had to move their upper arms and hands too fast. Their work postures were not good for their bodies.

According to biomedical analyst Camilla Dahlqvist, the researchers wanted to study the working environment of housekeepers because they had seen signs that the work could be arduous. Nevertheless, they were surprised that the level of strain was as high as the study actually showed it to be.

## The study

- Fourteen female housekeepers were included in the study. They worked at seven different hotels in southern Sweden. Some of them were employed by cleaning services companies, while others were employed directly by the hotels.
- The work of the housekeepers was shown to put great strain on the upper part of the body. The speed of movement in their upper arms and wrists was too high, for example when they were wiping the sides of shower cabins. The muscles in their lower arms were not allowed to rest for a sufficiently long time. Many of them worked with their head bent too far forward.

According to Dahlqvist, the results are very clear: because of the strain which housekeepers endure, they are at great risk of developing musculoskeletal problems. People in other

occupations may suffer great strain on their hands, but for housekeepers the work is also strenuous for other parts of the body.

One of the housekeepers included in the study was Marie Åsberg, who is a housekeeper at Säröhus Hotel and Conference Centre in Gothenburg:

'I had measuring devices on my back, my arm and my forehead. The researchers also checked how I bent forward, when I did so and what I lifted.'



The housekeeper Marie Åsberg participated in the study.

Photograph: Lars Lanhed

Marie thought taking part was important.

'It's a good thing that our working environment is being studied. I hope the research can help raise awareness of our working conditions, how much we lift and how many movements we make. Every time I bend to pick up a wet bathrobe, I lift a couple of kilos. That adds up to a lot of kilos in a day and over the course of a year.'

The Department of Occupational and Environmental Medicine now recommends that the pace of work of housekeepers be reduced by requiring them to do fewer rooms a day. The researchers also recommend regular medical check-ups and early preventive measures for housekeepers who are at risk of suffering injury. In addition, an occupational health system is needed to carry out regular work risk assessments and train housekeepers in how to do their job in a way that minimises strain.