

DURATION AND MAIN CAUSES OF SICK LEAVE OF DUTCH FARMERS

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The aim of this study was to analyse the causes and duration of sick leave among self-employed farmers in the Netherlands. A database of a major Dutch insurance company, consisting of 10,556 claimants with a total of 17,607 claims from 1994 through August 31, 2000 was analysed. The main causes for sick leave were musculoskeletal disorders (40.9%), followed by injuries (33.5%). However, in older farmers (> 45 years old) musculoskeletal disorders accounted for a higher and injuries for a lower relative contribution, namely 44.3% and 27.9% of all claims.

Duration of sick leave depended highly on age: a survival analysis showed that in musculoskeletal disorders 79.9% of the oldest age group (> 45 years old) had recovered after two years, compared to 92.7% of the youngest age group (\leq 35 years old). In respiratory disorders the difference between the age groups was the biggest: 66.7% of the oldest age group had recovered after two years, compared to 88.1% of the youngest age group. Only in psychological disorders, no influence of age was seen.

These results indicate that prevention of health problems in agriculture should include reduction of physical load and strenuous working conditions. Prevention of health problems should start at young age, because of the long-term health effects at older age.