

# Incidence of ill-health related job loss and related social and occupational factors. The "unfit for the job" study: a one-year follow-up study of 51,132 workers

Francois-Xavier Lesage <sup>Corresp., 1</sup>, Frederic Dutheil <sup>2,3</sup>, Lode Godderis <sup>4</sup>, Aymeric Divies <sup>5</sup>, Guillaume Choron <sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Epsilon, Univ Montpellier, Univ Paul Valéry Montpellier 3, CHU, Montpellier, France

<sup>2</sup> CNRS, LaPSCo, Physiological and Psychosocial Stress, University Hospital of Clermont-Ferrand, CHU Clermont-Ferrand, Preventive and Occupational Medicine, WittyFit., Université Clermont Auvergne, Clermont-Ferrand, France

<sup>3</sup> Faculty of Health, School of Exercise Science, Australian Catholic University, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia

<sup>4</sup> Department of Public Health and Primary Care, Environment and Health, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Leuven, Belgium

<sup>5</sup> Occupational Health Service Ametra, Montpellier, France

<sup>6</sup> Univ Montpellier, CHU, Montpellier, France

Corresponding Author: Francois-Xavier Lesage

Email address: fx-lesage@chu-montpellier.fr

**Objective** The analysis of ill-health related job loss may be a relevant indicator for the prioritisation of actions in the workplace or in the field of public health, as well as a target for health promotion. The aim of this study was to analyse the medical causes, the incidence, and the characteristics of employees medically unfit to do their job.

**Methods** This one-year prospective study included all workers followed by occupational physicians in an occupational health service in the south of France. The incidence of unfitness for work have been grouped according to the main medical causes and analysed. We performed a multivariate analysis in order to adjust the observed risk of job loss based on the age groups, sex, occupation and the activity sectors.

**Results** Seventeen occupational physicians followed up 51,132 workers. The all-cause incidence of being unfit to return to one's job was 7.78‰ (n=398). The two main causes of being unfit for one's job were musculoskeletal disorders (47.2%, n=188) and mental ill-health (38.4%, n=153). Being over 50 years old [Odds ratio (OR) 2.63, 95% confidence interval (95% CI) 2.13-3.25] and being a woman [OR 1.52, 95% CI 1.21-1.91] were associated with the all-cause unfitness, independent of occupation and activity sector.

**Conclusions** Identification of occupational and demographic determinants independently associated with ill-health related job loss may provide significant and cost-effective arguments for health promotion and job loss prevention.

1 **Incidence of ill-health related job loss and related social and**  
2 **occupational factors. The “unfit for the job” study: a one-year**  
3 **follow-up study of 51,132 workers**

4

5 **François-Xavier Lesage**

6 [fx-lesage@chu-montpellier.fr](mailto:fx-lesage@chu-montpellier.fr)

7 affiliation:

8 Epsilon, Univ Montpellier, Univ Paul Valéry Montpellier 3, CHU, Montpellier, France

9

10

11 **Frederic Dutheil** [fred\\_dutheil@yahoo.fr](mailto:fred_dutheil@yahoo.fr)

12 <sup>1</sup> Université Clermont Auvergne, CNRS, LaPSCo, Physiological and Psychosocial Stress, University Hospital of  
13 Clermont-Ferrand, CHU Clermont-Ferrand, Preventive and Occupational Medicine, WittyFit, F-63000 Clermont-  
14 Ferrand, France

15 <sup>2</sup> Australian Catholic University, Faculty of Health, School of Exercise Science, Melbourne, Victoria 3065 Australia

16

17 **Lode Godderis** [lode.godderis@kuleuven.be](mailto:lode.godderis@kuleuven.be)

18 KU Leuven, Department of Public Health and Primary Care, Environment and Health,  
19 Kapucijnenvoer 35 Blok D, Box 7001, 3000 Leuven, Belgium

20

21 **Aymeric Divies** [aymeric.divies@sistra.pf](mailto:aymeric.divies@sistra.pf)

22 Occupational Health Service AMETRA, Montpellier, France

23

24 **Guillaume Choron** - [c\\_guillaume@live.fr](mailto:c_guillaume@live.fr)

25 Univ Montpellier, CHU, Montpellier, France

26

27

28

29

30 **Incidence of ill-health related job loss and related social and**  
31 **occupational factors. The “unfit for the job” study: a one-year**  
32 **follow-up study of 51,132 workers**

33  
34 **Objective** The analysis of ill-health related job loss may be a relevant indicator for  
35 the prioritisation of actions in the workplace or in the field of public health, as well  
36 as a target for health promotion. The aim of this study was to analyse the medical  
37 causes, the incidence, and the characteristics of employees medically unfit to do  
38 their job.

39 **Methods** This one-year prospective study included all workers followed by  
40 occupational physicians in an occupational health service in the south of France. The  
41 incidence of unfitness for work have been grouped according to the main medical  
42 causes and analysed. We performed a multivariate analysis in order to adjust the  
43 observed risk of job loss based on the age groups, sex, occupation and the activity  
44 sectors.

45 **Results** Seventeen occupational physicians followed up 51,132 workers. The all-  
46 cause incidence of being unfit to return to one’s job was 7.78‰ (n=398). The two  
47 main causes of being unfit for one’s job were musculoskeletal disorders (47.2%,  
48 n=188) and mental ill-health (38.4%, n=153). Being over 50 years old [Odds ratio  
49 (OR) 2.63, 95% confidence interval (95% CI) 2.13-3.25] and being a woman [OR  
50 1.52, 95% CI 1.21-1.91] were associated with the all-cause unfitness, independent  
51 of occupation and activity sector.

52 **Conclusions** Identification of occupational and demographic determinants  
53 independently associated with ill-health related job loss may provide significant and  
54 cost-effective arguments for health promotion and job loss prevention.

55

56

57

58 The assessment of occupational diseases and their impact is a difficult issue. However, it is  
59 important for setting priority actions concerning health and safety at work. Most data concerning  
60 these occupational diseases indirectly assesses their incidence or impact. The findings of The  
61 Health and Occupation Reporting network (THOR) highlighted the gap between the  
62 epidemiological assessment by a network of specialists removed from the workplace (i.e.,  
63 psychiatrist) and a direct assessment by an occupational physician linked to the workplace (Carder  
64 et al., 2009).

65 The difficulties with assessing the prevalence or the incidence of occupational diseases are (i)  
66 the comprehensive identification of the cases, (ii) the reliable notification of work causality  
67 concerning multifactorial diseases, and (iii) the knowledge about the population in whom these  
68 cases are identified. Over recent years, several occupational disease networks have been  
69 developed and data have been collected concerning occupational diseases. Several nationwide  
70 networks of clinical specialists have been developed in Europe (Stocks et al., 2015), such as THOR  
71 in the UK (McDonald et al., 2006), or the National Occupational Disease Surveillance and  
72 Prevention Network (RNV3P) in France (Bonnetterre et al., 2010; Faisandier et al., 2011). Another  
73 way to assess occupational diseases is to match different data sources. Mustard et al. (2015)  
74 matched different and independent data sources: (i) emergency department encounter records, (ii)  
75 lost-time workers compensation claims and (iii) representative samples of workers in a national  
76 health interview survey (Mustard et al., 2015).

77 Numerous countries may also have a compensation system for occupational diseases. Data  
78 concerning the recognition of occupational diseases are fairly easy to collect by the organisations  
79 which pay the compensation. These systems, however, may provide compensation to workers for  
80 benign illnesses, such as occupational contact eczema, but compensation may never be claimed

81 for some frequent and fairly serious diseases, such as work-related depression or burnout  
82 syndrome. Consequently, this kind of indicator is a poor representation of the main occupational  
83 health problems in a country or a region. Likewise, the analyses of the causes of disability pensions  
84 or disability retirements are probably not very suitable for assessing the incidence of occupational  
85 diseases. As a result, two of the main difficulties are the collection and use of relevant and reliable  
86 indicators.

87 Unfitness (“inaptitude” in French), is the recognition by the occupational physician that a  
88 worker's health status is no longer fit for their current job and that they will require a job change.  
89 This does not mean that the worker cannot work anymore, but that they can no longer work in their  
90 current position. In France, the assessment of the fitness or the unfitness to perform the job is  
91 exclusively carried out by the occupational physician (OP) during a medical examination. All paid  
92 workers are systematically followed by the OP, either yearly or every two years. Additional  
93 specific medical examinations are carried out when a medical problem occurs. Moreover, when a  
94 paid worker is on sick leave for one month or more, fitness is systematically assessed by the OP  
95 when the worker returns to work (during a medical examination called "the reinstatement visit").  
96 An “unfit for the job” outcome may be pronounced for several reasons, including but not limited  
97 to: (i) a change in an employee’s health status (e.g., returning to work after recovery from a serious  
98 illness or injury), (ii) a medical condition that may limit, reduce or prevent the person from  
99 effectively performing a new or current job (e.g., musculoskeletal conditions that limit mobility),  
100 (iii) a medical condition that is likely to make it unsafe both for the employee, their co-workers or  
101 the public (e.g., driving is essential to the job but the employee is subject to unpredictable and  
102 sudden unconsciousness). Each OP follows roughly 3,000 workers (Dutheil et al., 2017). There  
103 are currently 5,600 OPs in France who report one of three conditions back to the employer: fit, fit  
104 subject to work modification, or unfit for the job. Unfit for the job may lead to being assigned to  
105 a new suitable job in the same company, or to the termination of the employment contract due to  
106 medical issues. According to a recent study performed in one French region by the General Labour  
107 Department of the Ministry of Work, termination of the employment contract is the main

108 conclusion of an unfitness notification (more than 97% of cases) (Fernand, 2012).  
109 A previous study explored the analysis of the “unfit for the job” determination among 55,026  
110 workers by collecting data directly from the medical records of a French occupational health  
111 service (Dutheil et al., 2016). The main limitation of this study was that only a univariate analysis  
112 was performed. Indeed, the data concerning the followed up workers were non-individual statistics  
113 and demographic information in aggregated form (e.g., sex ratio, occupations, average age), not a  
114 data frame extracted from the information system. Consequently, the socio-demographics could  
115 not be merged with the data frame of unfitness. However, to our knowledge, this is the only study  
116 analysing ill-health related job loss.

117

118 The current study aimed to estimate the incidence of unfitness for the job in an occupational  
119 health service over a period of one year, and to describe their aetiology and the characteristics of  
120 the unfit employees.

121

122

## 123 ***Methods***

124

125 Study design and setting

126

127 This follow-up study took place between January 1<sup>st</sup> 2014 and December 31<sup>st</sup> 2014 in the  
128 occupational health service in Montpellier (France). Seventeen OPs followed up the employees of  
129 this employment area (except for the farming area and the employees in public services).

130

131

132 Procedure and participants

133

134 All of the workers seen in this occupational health service in 2014 were eligible for participation

135 in the study. General data concerning the workers were extracted from the information system:  
136 age, sex, length of service, occupation and industry, fitness or unfitness. Occupation was coded to  
137 four digits using the French Occupational Classification (PCS-2003 socio-professional categories)  
138 and the industries were coded using the European NACE-2008 nomenclature and aggregated A10  
139 international classification. When an OP reported an “unfit for the job”, they collected the age,  
140 sex, socio-professional group, activity sector, and the diagnostic cause of the unfitness, which was  
141 supported by an expert medical opinion (e.g., by a psychiatrist, orthopedic specialist, or a  
142 rheumatologist depending on the disease) and the OP’s own judgment on the work causality. The  
143 duration of the sick leave, the accident at work or the occupational disease recognition procedure,  
144 and what became of the employee (occupational reclassification, discharge due to unfitness) were  
145 also collected.

146 The subject’s fitness for modified work or unfitness with occupational reclassification were not  
147 collected as an outcome. Each OP checked the cases of “unfit for the job” using an informatics  
148 query at the end of the year and completed the data collection if necessary. All data were  
149 anonymously collected. Participants were recruited during annual work medical examinations. No  
150 consent was given because anonymous data was used from normal daily clinical practices taken  
151 from medical records. The IRB approved the study (2018\_IRB-MTP\_02-02)

152

153

154 Statistical analysis

155

156 The incidence of unfitness to work was calculated (numerator = number of unfit workers;  
157 denominator = number of followed up employees). The statistical analyses were conducted for all  
158 causes of unfitness and for the two main groups of pathologies. The relationship between unfitness  
159 and the other characteristics was calculated using the crude Odds Ratio (ORc) and its 95%  
160 Confidence Interval (95% CI). Multivariate analyses were computerised, adjusting for age, sex,  
161 occupation and industry, using logistic regression models to provide the adjusted Odds Ratio

162 (ORa). Statistical analyses were conducted using the R and epicalc packages.

163

164

## 165 **Results**

166

167 Overall, 51,132 employees were followed up by 17 OPs in 2014 and were included in this study.

168 Among them, 398 cases of “unfit for the job” were reported. The overall incidence of “unfit for  
169 the job” was 7.8‰.

170 Demographics and company characteristics of employees both fit and unfit for the job are  
171 presented in Table 1. The mean age of followed up workers was 38.7 years (SD=11.8). The unfit  
172 for the job workers were older (mean = 44.4 years; SD=11.8,  $p<0.001$ ).

173 When all causes were considered, women [ORa 1.52, 95% CI 1.21-1.91] and workers over 50  
174 years old [ORa 2.63, 95% CI 2.13-3.25] were more frequently unfit for the job (Table 2).

175 Two groups of pathologies caused 85.7% of the cases of unfitness: musculoskeletal disorders  
176 (MSD) (47.2%) and mental ill-health (38.4%) (Table 2).

177

178 Most of the cases of unfitness were caused by a MSD. The average age of these workers was 46.0  
179 years (SD=11.3). Among the 188 cases of unfitness caused by a MSD, 32.4% were recognized as  
180 an occupational injury/disease, whereas 64.0% of these pathologies were estimated to be work  
181 related by the OP. The average length of sick leave was significant (13.1 months, SD 12.3). After  
182 adjustment, unfitness caused by a MSD was associated with gender [women ORa 1.89, 95% CI  
183 1.35-2.66] and the odds ratio increased with the age groups, notably that of over 50 year olds  
184 (Table 2). With regard to the association with the industry, the activity sector for which the number  
185 of cases of unfitness was below 10 (manufacturing, construction, and information &  
186 communication) were excluded from the analysis. Moreover, the financial and insurance sectors  
187 were aggregated with real estate activities. This aggregated sector was considered as the reference  
188 group. All of the other sectors were significantly associated with unfitness, but after adjustment,

189 only one sector (trade, repair, transportation, accommodation and food services) remained  
190 statistically significant [ORa 3.65, 95% CI 1.32-10.1] (Table 2). The group containing the higher  
191 grade white collar workers was less concerned [ORa 0.12, 95% CI 0.02-0.88] by unfitness than  
192 the reference group (intermediate occupations and lower supervisors). By contrast, the blue collar  
193 workers were highly concerned by unfitness resulting from a MSD [ORa 8.13, 95% CI 4.52-14.62]  
194 compared with the same reference group (Table 2).

195

196 One hundred and fifty three declarations of unfitness caused by mental ill-health were delivered.  
197 Eight cases (5.2%) were recognized as an occupational injury or an occupational disease by the  
198 health insurance. Conversely, the OP estimated that 64.7% of these diseases were work related.  
199 Compared to MSD, the average length of sick leave (10.3 months SD 10.5) was lower ( $p < 0.05$ )  
200 and workers were younger (40.9 years versus 46.0,  $p < 0.001$ ). Unlike for MSD, age and gender  
201 were less associated with mental ill-health related unfitness. Moreover, all occupation groups and  
202 activity sectors were concerned (Table 2).

203

204

## 205 *Discussion*

206

207 Data for this study were directly collected by the OP who determined whether the patient was  
208 “unfit for the job” or not. Consequently, the job losses and the medical causes are as reliable as  
209 possible. Moreover, they are based on a medical examination, supported by an expert medical  
210 opinion, and directly extracted from the medical records. Therefore, the data may be considered  
211 as reliable and of high quality.

212 The study design allowed information concerning the denominator to be completed. One  
213 strength of our design is that the population followed by the OP involved in this study is known  
214 and the requested information was extracted directly from the information system. Most of the  
215 experts in the network have accurate data concerning the cases (i.e., an occupational disease) but

216 cannot collect reliable data on the population observed and, consequently, the indicators (e.g.,  
217 incidence or associated risk).

218 Determining whether the patient's health is insufficient for the related job, known as "unfit for  
219 the job" in France, is exclusively performed by the worker's OP. Consequently, the number of  
220 cases of ill-health related job loss is probably under-evaluated. For example, an employee with  
221 anxiety or depression caused by a conflict at work may choose to resign, but will lose  
222 unemployment insurance. By contrast, a termination for a medical reason will maintain the  
223 unemployment insurance and termination indemnity. Consequently, it is in the interest of a worker  
224 with a medical problem to be determined unfit for their job rather than to resign from the company.  
225 Particularly severe or life-threatening diseases (e.g., most cancers) are probably under-evaluated  
226 in this study design, which is probably not appropriately adapted to reliably assess the impact of  
227 such pathologies on jobs.

228 Ill-health related job losses and socio-demographic data are easy to extract from the information  
229 systems using a simple SQL query. Most of the data are comprehensively coded in the databases  
230 of the occupational health services. Moreover, such an epidemiological system is very cost  
231 effective and is based on the French occupational health system.

232 One of the major advantages of integrating a denominator (the demographics of all the workers  
233 followed up by each OP) is the ability to carry out multivariate analyses. These analyses can  
234 provide risk assessments which would allow these risks to be monitored and geographical  
235 comparisons to be made in France, or other European countries. This would help to accurately  
236 identify ill-health related job losses.

237

238 The reader should be aware that this study design does not identify work related diseases, neither  
239 can it provide a job loads attributable risk, but rather assesses the impact of diseases, work-related  
240 or not, on the capacity to maintain the current job.

241 In our opinion, this must not be considered as a weakness of this study. The mechanisms of the  
242 observed pathologies may be partly, completely or not at all work-related. However, it is a delicate

243 issue to determine if a disease is work-related or not (the work causality) for each individual.  
244 Diseases are often multifactorial with personal, professional and extra professional components  
245 (e.g., a sub acromial impingement and musculoskeletal disorder). In fact, all data concerning the  
246 issue of work causality should be cautiously interpreted. In our study, the outcome is job loss,  
247 which is an objective data, rather than the work causality of cases, which requires a judgement.  
248 The analysis of the “unfitness for the job”, even if it does not allow the work related causality to  
249 be determined, allows at-risk groups to be identified and preventative actions to be promoted in  
250 order to support the continuation of employment.

251

252

253 Findings

254

255 The global one-year incidence of unfitness in our study was 7.8‰. A similar study of ill-health  
256 related job losses was previously conducted in 2012 in another occupational health service in the  
257 east of France (Dutheil et al., 2016). Dutheil et al. found very similar results. They found that the  
258 overall one year incidence of job losses was 7.7 ‰. Dutheil’s study confirmed the major impact  
259 of MSD and mental ill-health on employment. However, the design of this previous study did not  
260 allow multivariate analysis (c.f. above). Our study design allowed multivariate analysis because  
261 there was a single data frame for fit and unfit workers, and consequently the possibility to adjust  
262 the Odds Ratios based on the age groups, sex, occupation and activity sector, which are strongly  
263 associated with job losses. Our findings highlight that 85.7% of ill-health related job losses are  
264 related to MSD (47.2%) and mental ill-health (38.4%) (Table 2). The high prevalence of job losses  
265 related to MSD (Lederer, Weltle & Weber, 2001; Cherry et al., 2001; Chen, McDonald & Cherry,  
266 2006) and mental ill-health (Lederer, Weltle & Weber, 2001; Cherry, Chen & McDonald, 2006;  
267 Reinhardt, Wahrendorf & Siegrist, 2013) have been estimated in other countries. Recent data from

268 the THOR-GP network (UK – 2015-2016) estimated that 85% of self-reported work related ill-  
269 health is caused by these two groups of pathologies (Carder et al., 2013), which is similar to our  
270 findings. This supports the relevance of “unfit for the job” as an indicator, even if it does not assess  
271 the work related incidence of different pathologies. Moreover, the process of rating a pathology as  
272 work related is partly subjective and complex, and may lead to a misclassification.

273 The Labour Force Survey (LFS) is the Health and Safety Executive’s data source,  
274 complemented by other sources such as death certificates and reports from doctors (THOR). It  
275 estimated the incidences of work related ill health by stress-anxiety-depression and MSD as  
276 690/100,000 workers and 550/100,000 respectively (Health and Safety Executive)

277 . The incidences were higher than the job loss incidence because all of these cases of work-  
278 related ill health did not lead to a classification of “unfit for the job”. Stress, anxiety, and depression  
279 accounted for 37% of all work related ill health cases in 2015/2016, and MSD accounted for 41%  
280 of all work related illnesses. These data suggest that mental ill-health and MSD are not only the  
281 two main causes of work related diseases, but are also the two main causes of job loss.

282 The underlying employment area could not be representative of France as a whole. That is why  
283 we didn’t extrapolated our findings, even if a previous study (Dutheil), conducted in another region  
284 of French, found a very similar incidence of job loss. Moreover, farming and public service  
285 employees (and to a certain extent the construction industry) are followed up by specific health  
286 services. Further study is needed to assess the ill health related job losses in these specific activity  
287 sectors. However, it would be interesting to extrapolate the data based on socio-professional  
288 categories to assess the burden of ill health related job loss in France.

289

290

291 Musculoskeletal disorders

292

293 Our findings highlight the significant increase in the risk of job loss caused by musculoskeletal  
294 disorders in workers over 50 years of age. This is a major risk among blue collar workers. It is a  
295 particularly worrying situation for people over the age of 50 because the capacity to find a new job  
296 in activity sectors where mechanical loads are frequent, and one which is adapted to the potential  
297 disability caused by the MSD, may lead to employment problems for the concerned workers and  
298 significant social problems. Unfortunately, in our opinion, primary prevention for workplace tasks  
299 is probably rarely or insufficiently adapted to the age of the worker. However, maintaining  
300 working ability in early old age is essential for sustaining economic growth in Europe (Reinhardt,  
301 Wahrendorf & Siegrist, 2013).

302

303

304 Mental ill-health

305

306 Our findings highlight the huge impact of mental ill-health on job loss. These diseases are invisible  
307 in the national data on occupational diseases (e.g., the recognized occupational diseases), notably  
308 because it is probably very difficult to determine work causality. For example, according Wong et  
309 al., attribution of mental illness to work is thought to involve the consideration of 18 factors (11  
310 workplace factors and 7 personal vulnerability factors) (Wong, Poole & Agius, 2015). In this  
311 study, work causality is determined by the OP's own judgement and their knowledge of the  
312 workplace. According to French medical insurance data, only a few hundred cases of anxiety or  
313 depression are recognized as an occupational disease by the medical insurance.

314 Another important finding is that all workers are concerned. There may be an increased risk for  
315 women or older workers, but all socio-professional statuses and activity sectors are impacted by  
316 this issue.

317

318

319 Sex

320

321 The results highlight the gender inequalities in the face of job loss due to ill-health (Table 2).

322 Dutheil et al. observed similar univariate risks for job loss due to MSD, mental ill-health and  
323 all-causes together for female workers (RR= 1.51, 1.70 and 1.51 respectively) (9).

324 This gender inequality issue probably needs particular attention. One reason for such inequality  
325 may be that a high proportion of women work in activity sectors with high physical or  
326 psychological loads. For example, according the National Statistics Institute, women constitute  
327 87% of nurses and 62% of unskilled workers. There are too few cases of job losses in this study  
328 (398 cases) to analyse the risks associated with specific occupations matched with sex ratio.  
329 However, an extended study (only 17 OPs participated in this study versus over 5,000 OPs in  
330 France) could provide more accurate information. A more specific analysis of activity sectors and  
331 jobs for the observed population could provide more accurate “indications” concerning these  
332 observed data.

333

334

335 Age

336

337 Our findings concerning the average age of unfit workers (44.4 years), and the risks of unfit  
338 among workers aged 50 years and older according to the disease groups (Table 2), are similar to  
339 the findings of the previous study carried out in 2012 (Dutheil et al., 2016)(9). In this study, the  
340 average age of unfit workers was 45.9 years, and the risks of job loss for workers up to the age of  
341 50 resulting from a MSD, a mental ill-health and all causes together, were 2.92, 1.38, and 2.51  
342 respectively. Not surprisingly, our findings highlight the progressive increase of the odds ratios of  
343 job loss with the age of the workers, particularly for MSD.

344 The findings by Alavinia et al., which highlighted the higher relative risk of long term absence due

345 to sickness among those  $\geq 50$  years old (RR= 2.08 [1.33;3.24]; ref = workers < 40 years old ), are  
346 consistent with our data (Alavinia et al., 2009). Older workers are a more fragile population, with  
347 a higher prevalence of chronic and disabling pathologies leading to long term absence due to  
348 sickness and a higher incidence of job loss. Moreover, the combination of a disabling pathology  
349 and the loss of a job is a problematic cocktail for professional reintegration. In our opinion, this  
350 population is a major priority for primary and secondary preventive actions.

351

352 The use of the international ICD-10 classification for the encoding of pathologies that lead to a  
353 determination of unfitness would increase the quality and the processing speed of analyses.  
354 Unfortunately, the different information systems in the occupational health services do not provide  
355 such a possibility at this time. However, a common system would considerably enhance the  
356 epidemiological capacity to analyse ill-health related job losses, and increase the processing speed.

357 It would be appropriate to match our findings with other data sources, such as expert-based  
358 networks or observations, as we believe that our data are complementary.

359 The population included in our study was limited (50,000 workers). A more significant  
360 population would increase the power of the analysis and would allow a more accurate  
361 identification of the sub groups of workers, or specific socio-professional categories, at risk of  
362 losing their jobs for medical reasons. It would also provide better information concerning  
363 prevention targets or further specific studies.

364

### 365 ***Conclusions***

366 French occupational health systems have an important and cost effective epidemiological  
367 capacity. The supervisory authority of the occupational health services, the General Labour  
368 Department of the Ministry of Work, should consider promoting such an epidemiological approach  
369 based on occupational health service data, which could provide useful, accurate, and reliable  
370 information in the field of occupational health. Moreover, occupational health information systems  
371 contain accurate and high quality data on workplace analysis, medical records, or

372 sociodemographic data. Several European countries, such as Belgium, could also collect and  
373 analyse similar data (Godderis et al., 2015). For these very reasons, an Occupational Health System  
374 Data Analysis network should be promoted.

375

376

### 377 *Acknowledgements*

378 The authors would like to thank the Occupational physicians who participated in the study, the  
379 occupational health service AMETRA-Montpellier, and in particular Mr Bruno Yerriah.

380

381

382

### 383 *References*

384

385 Alavinia SM., van den Berg TIJ., van Duivenbooden C., Elders LAM., Burdorf A. 2009. Impact  
386 of work-related factors, lifestyle, and work ability on sickness absence among Dutch  
387 construction workers. *Scandinavian Journal of Work, Environment & Health* 35:325–  
388 333.

389 Bonnetterre V., Faisandier L., Bicout D., Bernardet C., Piollat J., Ameille J., de Clavière C.,

390 Aptel M., Lasfargues G., de Gaudemaris R., RNV3P 2010. Programmed health

391 surveillance and detection of emerging diseases in occupational health: contribution of

392 the French national occupational disease surveillance and prevention network (RNV3P).

393 *Occupational and Environmental Medicine* 67:178–186. DOI:

394 10.1136/oem.2008.044610.

395 Carder M., McNamee R., Turner S., Hodgson JT., Holland F., Agius RM. 2013. Time trends in

396 the incidence of work-related mental ill-health and musculoskeletal disorders in the UK.

397 *Occupational and Environmental Medicine* 70:317–324. DOI: 10.1136/oemed-2012-

- 398 100904.
- 399 Carder M., Turner S., McNamee R., Agius R. 2009. Work-related mental ill-health and “stress”  
400 in the UK (2002-05). *Occupational Medicine (Oxford, England)* 59:539–544. DOI:  
401 10.1093/occmed/kqp117.
- 402 Chen Y., McDonald JC., Cherry NM. 2006. Incidence and suspected cause of work-related  
403 musculoskeletal disorders, United Kingdom, 1996-2001. *Occupational Medicine*  
404 *(Oxford, England)* 56:406–413. DOI: 10.1093/occmed/kql040.
- 405 Cherry NM., Chen Y., McDonald JC. 2006. Reported incidence and precipitating factors of  
406 work-related stress and mental ill-health in the United Kingdom (1996-2001).  
407 *Occupational Medicine (Oxford, England)* 56:414–421. DOI: 10.1093/occmed/kql041.
- 408 Cherry NM., Meyer JD., Chen Y., Holt DL., McDonald JC. 2001. The reported incidence of  
409 work-related musculoskeletal disease in the UK: MOSS 1997-2000. *Occupational*  
410 *Medicine (Oxford, England)* 51:450–455.
- 411 Dutheil F., Naughton G., Sindyga P., Lesage F-X. 2016. Ill Health-Related Job Loss: A One-  
412 Year Follow-Up of 54,026 Employees. *Journal of Occupational and Environmental*  
413 *Medicine* 58:918–923. DOI: 10.1097/JOM.0000000000000825.
- 414 Dutheil F., Pereira B., Moustafa F., Naughton G., Lesage F-X., Lambert C. 2017. At-risk and  
415 intervention thresholds of occupational stress using a visual analogue scale. *PloS One*  
416 12:e0178948. DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0178948.
- 417 Faisandier L., Bonneterre V., De Gaudemaris R., Bicout DJ. 2011. Occupational exposome: a  
418 network-based approach for characterizing Occupational Health Problems. *Journal of*  
419 *Biomedical Informatics* 44:545–552. DOI: 10.1016/j.jbi.2011.02.010.
- 420 Fernand J. 2012. *Trajectoires Inaptitudes - Direccte Bretagne*.. Available on

- 421 <http://bretagne.directe.gouv.fr/trajec-toires-inaptitudes>
- 422 Godderis L., Mylle G., Coene M., Verbeek C., Viaene B., Bulterys S., Schouteden M. 2015.
- 423 Data warehouse for detection of occupational diseases in OHS data. *Occupational*
- 424 *Medicine (Oxford, England)* 65:651–658. DOI: 10.1093/occmed/kqv074.
- 425 Health and Safety Executive. *Statistics - Work related musculoskeletal disorders*. Available on
- 426 <http://www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/causdis/musculoskeletal/index.htm>
- 427 Lederer P., Weltle D., Weber A. 2001. [Illness-related premature unfit-ness for work among civil
- 428 servants in Bavaria - an evaluation in the social medical field]. *Gesundheitswesen*
- 429 *(Bundesverband Der Arzte Des Offentlichen Gesundheitsdienstes (Germany))* 63:509–
- 430 513. DOI: 10.1055/s-2001-16688.
- 431 McDonald JC., Beck MH., Chen Y., Cherry NM. 2006. Incidence by occupation and industry of
- 432 work-related skin diseases in the United Kingdom, 1996-2001. *Occupational Medicine*
- 433 *(Oxford, England)* 56:398–405. DOI: 10.1093/occmed/kql039.
- 434 Mustard CA., Chambers A., Ibrahim S., Etches J., Smith P. 2015. Time trends in musculoskeletal
- 435 disorders attributed to work exposures in Ontario using three independent data sources,
- 436 2004-2011. *Occupational and Environmental Medicine* 72:252–257. DOI:
- 437 10.1136/oemed-2014-102442.
- 438 Reinhardt JD., Wahrendorf M., Siegrist J. 2013. Socioeconomic position, psychosocial work
- 439 environment and disability in an ageing workforce: a longitudinal analysis of SHARE
- 440 data from 11 European countries. *Occupational and Environmental Medicine* 70:156–
- 441 163. DOI: 10.1136/oemed-2012-100924.
- 442 Stocks SJ., McNamee R., van der Molen HF., Paris C., Urban P., Campo G., Sauni R., Martínez
- 443 Jarreta B., Valenty M., Godderis L., Miedinger D., Jacquetin P., Gravseth HM.,

444 Bonneterre V., Telle-Lamberton M., Bensefa-Colas L., Faye S., Mylle G., Wannag A.,  
445 Samant Y., Pal T., Scholz-Odermatt S., Papale A., Schouteden M., Colosio C., Mattioli  
446 S., Agius R., Working Group 2; Cost Action IS1002—Monitoring trends in Occupational  
447 Diseases and tracing new and Emerging Risks in a NETwork (MODERNET) 2015.  
448 Trends in incidence of occupational asthma, contact dermatitis, noise-induced hearing  
449 loss, carpal tunnel syndrome and upper limb musculoskeletal disorders in European  
450 countries from 2000 to 2012. *Occupational and Environmental Medicine* 72:294–303.  
451 DOI: 10.1136/oemed-2014-102534.

452 Wong MGP., Poole CJM., Agius R. 2015. Attribution of mental illness to work: a Delphi study.  
453 *Occupational Medicine (Oxford, England)* 65:391–397. DOI: 10.1093/occmed/kqv050.

454

455

456

457 **What is new in the paper?**

458

459 - In addition to a previous study in France (9), we conducted a multivariate analysis of the  
460 causes of job loss in order to adjust the Odds Ratios for the age groups, sex, occupation, and  
461 activity sectors strongly associated with job loss.

462 - We support the recognition of the French occupational health system as an important and  
463 cost effective epidemiological tool.

464

465

466

467



**Table 1** (on next page)

Demographics, company characteristics, and incidence of unfitness for the job

		<i>Employees unfit for the job</i>	<i>Employees fit for the job</i>	<i>One-year Incidence of unfitness ‰</i>
<b>Age (years)</b>	≤30 y	50 (12.6%)	15,298 (30.2%)	3.26
	31-40 y	91 (22.9%)	13,510 (26.7%)	6.70
	41-50 y	98 (24.6%)	12,180 (24.0%)	7.98
	51-60 y	124 (31.2%)	8,165 (16.1%)	14.96
	>60 y	35 (8.8%)	1,512 (3.0%)	22.62
<b>Sex</b>	<i>Men</i>	124 (31.2%)	21,279 (42.0%)	5.79
	<i>Women</i>	274 (68.8%)	29,455 (58.0%)	9.22
<b>Occupation</b>	Higher grade administrative and managerial occupations, higher grade professionals	24 (6.1%)	7,650 (17.0%)	3.13
	Intermediate occupations. Lower supervisors	65 (16.5%)	12,220 (27.2%)	5.29
	White collar workers. lower services, sales and clerical occupations	212 (53.8%)	19,671 (43.7%)	10.66
	Blue collar workers	93 (23.6%)	5,442 (12.1%)	16.80
<b>Workforce</b>	<10	105 (26.4%)	13,000 (25.6%)	8.01
	10-49	138 (34.7%)	16,102 (31.7%)	8.50
	50 - 249	93 (23.4%)	14,503 (28.6%)	6.37
	≥250	57 (14.3%)	7,129 (14.0%)	7.93
<b>Activity sectors (aggregated A10 code)</b>	Manufacturing (BE)	4 (1.0%)	154 (0.3%)	25.31
	Construction (FZ)	0	515 (1.0%)	0
	Wholesale and retail trade, repair of motor vehicles, transportation and storage, accommodation and food service activity (GI)	123 (30.9%)	14,051 (27.7%)	8.68
	Information & communication (JZ)	2 (5.0%)	2,306 (4.6%)	0.87
	Financial & insurance activities (KZ)	9 (2.3%)	2,954 (5.8%)	3.04
	Real estate activities (LZ)	13 (3.3%)	1,350 (2.7%)	9.54
	Professional, scientific and technical activities; administrative and support service activities (MN)	69 (17.3%)	9,696 (19.1%)	7.07
	Public administration, compulsory social security; education; human health and social work activities (OQ)	152 (38.2%)	14,909 (29.4%)	10.09
	Arts, entertainment, repair of household goods & other services (RU)	26 (6.5%)	4,799 (9.5%)	5.39
	<b>Overall Sample (number of workers)</b>	398 (100%)	50,734 (100%)	7.78



**Table 2** (on next page)

Factors associated with unfitness for the job, for the different causes of unfitness:  
univariate and multivariate analyses

ORc= crude Odds Ratio; ORa= odds ratio adjusted on age, sex, occupation and industry; OR  
in bold = OR statistically different of 1.

		<i>Causes of unfitness for the job</i>								
		Musculoskeletal disorders (n=188)			Psychopathologies (n=153)			All causes together (n=398)		
		ORc[CI95%]	ORa[CI95%]	<i>p</i>	ORc[CI95%]	ORa[CI95%]	<i>p</i>	ORc[CI95%]	ORa[CI95%]	<i>p</i>
<i>Age (years)</i>	≤30 y	1	1		1	1		1	1	
	31-40 y	1.76 [0.97 ; 3.25]	<b>2.37</b> [1.35 ; 4.18]	<0.001	<b>2.22</b> [1.34 ; 3.75]	<b>2.23</b> [1.36 ; 3.65]	<0.01	<b>2.05</b> [1.46 ; 2.90]	<b>2.43</b> [1.70 ; 3.45]	<0.001
	41-50 y	<b>3.14</b> [1.83 ; 5.57]	<b>3.81</b> [2.25 ; 6.45]		<b>1.96</b> [1.16 ; 3.38]	<b>1.90</b> [1.14 ; 3.18]		<b>2.46</b> [1.74 ; 3.44]	<b>2.64</b> [1.86 ; 3.76]	
	51-60 y	<b>6.56</b> [3.94 ; 11.39]	<b>7.35</b> [4.40 ; 12.28]		<b>2.4</b> [1.38 ; 4.22]	<b>2.26</b> [1.32 ; 3.86]		<b>4.59</b> [3.31 ; 6.37]	<b>4.75</b> [3.37 ; 6.69]	
	>60 y	8.60 [4.22 ; 17.32]	<b>9.93</b> [5.06 ; 19.49]		<b>3.24</b> [1.26 ; 7.42]	<b>3.22</b> [1.43 ; 7.23]		<b>6.94</b> [4.52 ; 10.66]	<b>7.62</b> [4.85 ; 11.96]	
	≤50 years	1	1		1	1		1	1	
>50 years	<b>3.65</b> [2.70 ; 4.91]	<b>3.41</b> [2.53 ; 4.61]	<0.001	<b>1.50</b> [1.02 ; 2.17]	1.41 [0.98 ; 2.04]	0.07	<b>2.82</b> [2.29 ; 3.46]	<b>2.63</b> [2.13 ; 3.25]	<0.001	
<i>Sex</i>	Men	1	1		1	1		1	1	
	Women	<b>1.64</b> [1.19 ; 2.25]	<b>1.89</b> [1.35 ; 2.66]	<0.001	<b>1.41</b> [1.00 ; 1.98]	1.31 [0.92 ; 1.88]	0.14	<b>1.48</b> [1.19 ; 1.83]	<b>1.52</b> [1.21 ; 1.91]	<0.001
<i>Occupations</i>	Intermediate occupations. Lower supervisors	1	1		1	1		1	1	
	Higher grade administrative and managerial occupations, higher grade professionals	<b>0.11</b> [0.00 ; 0.69]	<b>0.12</b> [0.02 ; 0.88]	<0.001	<b>0.65</b> [0.34 ; 1.16]	<b>0.76</b> [0.43 ; 1.35]	0.52	<b>0.59</b> [0.35 ; 0.96]	<b>0.66</b> [0.41 ; 1.06]	<0.001
	White collar workers. lower services, sales and clerical occupations	<b>4.47</b> [2.59 ; 8.27]	<b>3.88</b> [2.25 ; 6.70]		<b>1.09</b> [0.74 ; 1.64]	<b>1.10</b> [0.74 ; 1.64]		<b>2.03</b> [1.53 ; 2.72]	<b>1.95</b> [1.47 ; 2.60]	
	Blue collar workers	<b>9.43</b> [5.3 ; 17.85]	<b>8.13</b> [4.52 ; 14.62]		<b>1.02</b> [0.56 ; 1.79]	<b>1.17</b> [0.66 ; 2.07]		<b>3.21</b> [2.31 ; 4.49]	<b>3.23</b> [2.30 ; 4.54]	
Financial & insurance activities (KZ)	1	1			1	1			1	
<i>Activity sectors (aggregated A10 code)</i>	Real estate activities (LZ) n=4326	1	1		1	1		1	1	
	Wholesale and retail trade, repair of motor vehicles, transportation and storage, accommodation and food service activity (GI) n=14174	<b>5.26</b> [2.00;20.23]	<b>3.65</b> [1.32; 10.1]		1.01 [0.53;2.06]	<b>1.05</b> [0.55; 2.01]		<b>1.71</b> [1.08;2.84]	<b>1.45</b> [0.91; 2.32]	
	Professional, scientific and technical activities; administrative and support service activities (MN) n=9765	<b>4.22</b> [1.52 ;16.28]	2.36 [0.83; 6.71]	<0.01	0.75 [0.36;1.62]	<b>0.69</b> [0.34; 1.39]	0.25	1.39 [0.85;2.37]	<b>1.01</b> [0.61;1.65]	0.20
	Public administration, compulsory social security; education; human health and social work activities (OQ) n=15061	<b>4.33</b> [1.60;16.42]	2.33 [0.84;6.44]		1.38 [0.75;2.73]	<b>1.16</b> [0.63;2.12]		<b>1.99</b> [1.27;3.28]	<b>1.35</b> [0.86; 2.13]	
	Arts, entertainment, repair of household goods & other services (RU) n=4825	2.91 [0.90;12.28]	<b>1.99</b> [0.64;6.13]		0.76 [0.31;1.84]	<b>0.76</b> [0.34; 1.70]		1.06 [0.58;1.97]	<b>0.85</b> [0.48; 1.51]	