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Sonographers’ experiences of work-related musculoskeletal disorder: The everyday consequences of physiological stress and injury in contemporary ultrasound

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In 2013, the UK government’s Migration Advisory Committee listed sonography as an official ‘shortage specialty’ (Migration Advisory Committee, 2013; Parker & Harrison, 2015). As a consequence of the working stresses allied to this shortage, British sonographers have increasingly been reducing hours or leaving clinical practice entirely (Miller et al., 2018). Among those who remain, incidences of reported chronic pain and active injury are on the increase in a profession that was already synonymous with high rates of work-related musculoskeletal disorder (WRMSD) (Harrison & Harris, 2015). While contemporary research has described the rates of WRMSD among ultrasound practitioners (Bolton & Cox, 2015), none has to date extensively explored its personal and professional impacts on individual sonographers.

Participants routinely reported a sensation of guilt and depleted self-efficacy that not only permeated any working absence resultant of their own WRMSD, but also to taking legitimate leave when colleagues were suffering from WRMSD. An upshot of this was to recurrently “take one for the team” and work through excessive pain, even when this would likely result in greater prospective physical damage. While the basic shortage of sonographers was the core attribution for WRMSD-related issues of WRMSD. The issue of WRMSD remains complex and under-researched and few studies are able to establish its personal and professional impacts on individual sonographers.

Participants also cited (1) increasingly obese patients, (2) increasingly unhelpful (i.e. profiteering) equipment manufacturers, and (3) their perception of ‘self’ in relation to the causes of WRMSD. Perception of ‘Self’ to ‘Take one for the team’ and work through excessive pain, even when this would likely result in greater prospective physical damage. While the basic shortage of sonographers was the core attribution for WRMSD-related issues of WRMSD. The issue of WRMSD remains complex and under-researched and few studies are able to establish its personal and professional impacts on individual sonographers.


