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UK sonographers' perspectives on the cultural, professional and environmental contexts of living with work-related musculoskeletal disorders

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Abstract

Background: Work-related musculoskeletal disorder (WRMSD), already widespread among sonographers, is increasingly prevalent due, at least in part, to the physical stresses of working in understaffed environments (Miller et al., 2019). More than 80% of UK sonographers report suffering from WRMSD at some point, and it is estimated 20% will experience a career-ending injury (Sommerich et al., 2019). While sonographers typically understand that their own working practices can contribute to higher risk of WRMSD, many continue to scan even when directly affected condition. In order to help shape a stronger understanding of the circumstances above, this paper qualitatively reports sonographers' own perspectives on the cultural, professional and environmental contexts of living and working with WRMSD.

Methods: Using Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (Mawson et al., 2022), N=9 semi-structured interviews with experienced sonographers (>5 years) were analysed.

Findings: Five major themes emerged from the data: (a) 'It's just what we do' - sonographer culture as rationale; (b) 'They just don't care about us' - exasperation, faceless attribution and anxiety; (c) 'We just do what we can with what we've got' - finding practical workarounds; (d) 'The pressure is just ridiculous' - WRMSD, workload and stress; (e) 'Ergonomic instructions? What ergonomic instructions?' - physical environment and equipment.

Conclusion: It is contended that the findings above help provide depth and dimension in an understanding of why sonographers with WRMSD might pursue superficially self-defeating courses of action at work. In turn, this could help inform

more practitioner-sensitive interventions around WRMSD in ultrasound and analogous AHP domains.

References

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