Direct recruitment of workers and worksites in heavy industry for occupational field studies

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**Background**

Usual recruiting methods for large studies (via employer or union) may:
- Exclude small workplaces and the self-employed
- Allow employers to restrict research to sub-groups of occupations/sites
- Limit variability of jobs and work settings

**Research Setting**

- Large field study of occupational risk factors for low back injury
- Five heavy industries: Construction, Forestry, Transportation, Warehousing, & Wood products
- Recruitment of a random sample of workers with a workers’ compensation claim for back injury in 2001, plus recruitment of co-workers

**Study Objectives**

- Examine efficiency of contacting workers directly for an occupational field study
- Identify and overcome challenges to direct recruitment

**Direct Recruitment Process**

1. **WorkSafeBC** asks injured workers’ permission to release information for research
2. If worker agrees, UBC invites worker participation by letter, follows up by phone
3. WorkSafeBC asks in injured workers’ permission to release information for research
4. If worker agrees, UBC determines eligibility
5. If worker is eligible, UBC phones to invite employer to participate
6. Measure if employer agrees
7. UBC enrolls participant in study
8. UBC phones to invite employer to participate

**Results**

- Of the 338 workers successfully contacted by WorkSafeBC; 189 (41%) agreed to release information to researchers
- 155 of these workers were successfully contacted by UBC; 105 (68%) were eligible
- 74 (70%) of eligible workers agreed to participate, 54 (73%) were successfully measured.
- An average of 1.5 co-workers were recruited from worksites (range 1-6)
- 10 (19%) workers were self-employed
- Participation was highest for construction (54%), followed by forestry (40%), wood products (33%), transportation (31%) and warehousing (24%)

**Conclusions**

The results show promise for studies investigating exposure and health across a wide range of employment conditions, from the core to the margins.

**Advantages**

- Tremendous variety in workplaces, jobs, and workers
- Minimize bias towards large employers and unions

**Challenges**

- Added step of getting workers’ permission to release information via WorkSafeBC
- Developing multiple relationships with employees & employers is time-consuming
- Substantial correspondence and scheduling load

**Conclusion**

- The results show promise for studies investigating exposure and health across a wide range of employment conditions, from the core to the margins.