Gender differences in the occurrence of farm related injuries

H Dimich-Ward, J R Guernsey, W Pickett, D Rennie, L Hartling, R J Brison

Aims: To use national surveillance data in Canada to describe gender differences in the pattern of farm fatalities and severe injuries (those requiring hospitalisation).

Methods: Data from the Canadian Agricultural Injury Surveillance Program (CAISP) included farm work related fatalities from 1990 to 1996 for all Canadian provinces and abstracted information from hospital discharge records from eight provinces for the five fiscal years of 1990 to 1994. Gender differences in fatalities and injuries were examined by comparison of proportions and stratified by sex, injury class (machinery, non-machinery), and age group.

Results: Over the six year period of 1990 to 1996 there were approximately 11 times as many agriculture related fatalities for males compared to females (655 and 61, respectively). The most common machinery mechanisms of fatal injuries were roll-over (32%) for males and run-over (45%) for females. Agricultural machinery injuries requiring hospitalisation showed similar patterns, with proportionally more males over age 60 injured. The male:female ratio for non-machinery hospitalisations averaged 3:1. A greater percentage of males were struck by or caught against an object, whereas for females, animal related injuries predominated.

Conclusions: Gender is an important factor to consider in the interpretation of fatal and non-fatal farm injuries. A greater number of males were injured, regardless of how the occurrence of injury was categorised, particularly when farm machinery was involved. As women increasingly participate in all aspects of agricultural production, there is a need to collect, interpret, and disseminate information on agricultural injury that is relevant for both sexes.

Subjects and Methods

Fatalities

Farm work related fatalities from 1990 to 1996 were available for analysis using CAISP protocols from all Canadian provinces. Sources of information included: provincial coroner’s offices, police, government agencies including Vital Statistics, and occupational health and safety associations.

Hospitalisations

Confidentiality agreements have been established with all provinces for access to hospital separation data through provincial agencies. The data collection protocol and the CAISP program underwent ethical review, as required.

Agricultural injuries were identified using ICD-9 E-codes. Hospital discharge records were searched using mechanism and location of occurrence of injury codes. Where there was more than one admission due to readmission or transfer, only the main treatment record was used. After receiving

Abbreviations: CAISP, Canadian Agricultural Injury Surveillance Program; E-code, external causes of injuries code; ICD 9, International Classification of Diseases, ninth revision; SPSS, Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
Main messages

- Gender is an important factor to consider in the collection, interpretation, and dissemination of information on agricultural injury.
- A greater number of males had farm-related injuries; male:female ratios were highest for those over 60 injured by farm machinery.
- Proportionally more women were injured by farm animals; older women had a greater percentage of fractures and injuries from falls.

Policy implications

- Surveillance and analysis of farm related injuries and fatalities should distinguish male from female injuries.
- Farm injury prevention programmes should stress gender sensitivity using education, regulation, or engineering approaches.

The two most common machinery mechanisms of fatal injuries for males were roll-overs (32%) and being run-over (20%), while for females the order was reversed (p<0.05): run-over (45%) and roll-over (24%). Tractors were involved in 65% and 69% of all fatalities for men and women respectively. For males, the two most common causes were being struck by an object (33%) and animals (14%). Only 19 female fatalities were attributed to non-machinery causes over the seven year period; 37% were due to animals and 32% to being struck by an object.

Analysis by relationship of the deceased to the owner/operator showed significant gender differences. For males, 50% were owner/operators, 10% were children of the owner/operator, and 10% involved hired workers. For females, the largest categories of fatalities were of children of the owner/operator (30%) and spouses of the owner/operator (23%), with no males reported as spouses; only 7% of the female fatalities were of owner/operators. Visitors were known to be involved in only 2% of fatalities for both sexes.

DISCUSSION

Differences between males and females were apparent in the patterns of farm related injury. Injuries to males predominated. The highest ratios of male to female injuries were for fatalities and hospitalisations from agricultural machinery, particularly among men over age 60. Overall, we found ratios of males to females of 9:1 and 11:1 respectively for machinery hospitalisations, where the sex ratio shows only slight variation by age.

Men 15–59 years of age had a greater percentage of hospitalisation injuries due to being caught in or entangled in machinery (table 3). Tractors were the most common farm machinery involved in hospitalisation injuries for both males and females at 28% each. The distribution of non-machinery injury causes of hospitalisations show more pronounced differences (p<0.05) according to age group and sex. Females age 60 and above had a relatively higher percentage of injuries by falls. In general, animals were the most common cause of non-machinery related injuries, accounting for one half of injuries for females under 60 years of age. For females, 65% of the animal related injuries were caused by horses and 30% by cows, which contrasts to 38% and 56% respectively for males.

Comparison of main diagnoses according to age group and sex (data not shown) showed a higher percentage of fractures (52%) for females 60 years or older, in comparison to 40% for males in this age group. Males had a consistently higher percentage of lacerations.
comparison to 35% of women. We found that tractors were involved in the majority of cases, but the leading mechanism of fatality was roll-over for males and run-over for females. The high risk of machinery related fatalities, particularly involving tractors, has been well documented. We found that for non-fatal injuries for both sexes, the leading mechanism of machinery injury requiring hospitalisation was being caught or entangled in machinery.

The lowest sex ratios were for non-machinery causes of hospitalisations; on average for every female injured there were three male injuries. The disparities in prevalence of injury appear to be reduced with decreasing severity of injury. Rivara found that the ratio of male to female farm related deaths was 5.6 in comparison to 2.4 for emergency department injuries.

Causes of non-machinery agricultural fatalities and hospitalisations were age and sex dependent. For females under age 60, a greater percentage of injuries were due to animals, whereas older women had a higher percentage attributable to falls. Studies in Manitoba, Canada and Australia indicate that animals are a common source of farm related injury, particularly among girls. Falls are recognised to be a common cause of unintentional non-fatal injury and deaths among females, accounting for almost 90% of deaths in the USA for older females.

A greater percentage of women over age 60 than men were diagnosed with fractures. Degenerative changes with aging, such as osteoporosis may be important factors. The extreme sex ratio of over 60:1 was observed for fatalities caused by agricultural machinery for men age 60 and above. The high risk of injury and death from farming activities among older men has been identified in previous studies and attributed to the onset of age related physiological changes, such as slowing of reaction time and more working hours on the farm after retirement. The gender disparity in fatalities may also reflect less participation and hence less exposure among older females.

When considering farm safety the entire family must be taken into account as all are exposed to the work environment. Among females, a large percentage of fatalities were observed for children. A Minnesota survey found a more extreme percentage in that over half of all females who had severe or fatal farm injuries were children under 10 years of age. Hazardous work conditions in agriculture create a unique problem by affecting those not directly employed in farming activities. Children are particularly vulnerable to severe injury or death due to their small bodily size and immature development.

Differences in the extent of exposure to agricultural activities, ergonomic aspects of the agricultural environment in relation to body size and physiology, and variations in the nature of agricultural tasks are likely to contribute to gender and age differences in the patterns of injuries and fatalities. A 1995 Wisconsin study found lower average hours of farm work for women (20 hours versus 50 hours for men) as did a 1995 study in Ontario, Canada in which 23% of females (versus 62% of males) performed farm work at least 40 hours a week. In Canada, over the past two decades there has been an increase in the number of hours per week and weeks per year worked on the farm by women, and this pattern would be expected to continue.

A strength of our study was that it was not limited to compensable injuries or to a particular worker subgroup. A further advantage is that national data were collected systematically from hospital sources, with no reliance on volunteer reporting. These two factors provide a broader picture of the extent of injuries attributed to agricultural production. A limitation is the lack of accurate denominator data from which to calculate rates. For instance, Canadian census data on farm populations does not include hired labourers. Furthermore, there is no detailed exposure data available, such as hours of farm work or type of farm, from the fatality and hospitalisation data sources.

Gender is an important factor to consider in the interpretation of fatal and non-fatal farm injuries. As women

### Table 1

Agricultural fatalities in Canada by class of injury, gender, and age group (1990–96)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Machinery*</th>
<th>Non-machinery</th>
<th>Combined*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Males n (%)</td>
<td>Females n (%)</td>
<td>Ratio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;14</td>
<td>48 (10)</td>
<td>15 (36)</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15–59</td>
<td>227 (49)</td>
<td>24 (57)</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60+</td>
<td>187 (41)</td>
<td>3 (7)</td>
<td>62.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>462</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>11:1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p<0.05

### Table 2

Agricultural injuries requiring hospitalisation in Canada† (1990–94 fiscal years), according to class of injury, gender, and age group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Machinery*</th>
<th>Non-machinery*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Males n (%)</td>
<td>Females n (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0–9</td>
<td>236</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10–19</td>
<td>360</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20–29</td>
<td>379</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30–39</td>
<td>563</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40–49</td>
<td>551</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50–59</td>
<td>528</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60–69</td>
<td>537</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70+</td>
<td>390</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3644</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

†Data were unavailable for two provinces, Newfoundland and Nova Scotia.

*p<0.02
increasingly participate in all aspects of agricultural production, there is a need to collect, interpret, and disseminate information on agricultural injury that is relevant for both sexes. Cultural and social determinants of gender distinctions in recurrent patterns of injury should be considered in future aetiological and qualitative research. A further recommendation is that farm injury prevention programmes stress gender sensitivity using education, regulation, or engineering approaches.

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Data were unavailable for two provinces, Newfoundland and Nova Scotia.
*p<0.05.


ECHO

Psychological and psychosocial factors and musculoskeletal pain

Studies of musculoskeletal pain among workers have usually been cross sectional, have involved established work forces (so that workers with symptoms may have left), have included workers in a single occupation, and have concentrated on pain at a single anatomical site. Researchers in Manchester have performed a prospective study of pain at four different sites (low back, shoulder, wrist/forearm, and knee) involving newly employed workers in a variety of occupations.

The 1081 subjects had been employed in their present work for a mean of eight months and were trainees in 12 occupational groups (fire fighters, police, army (officers, infantry, or clerks), students (dental, nursing, podiatry, or forestry), supermarket workers, postal workers, and ship building apprentices). Questionnaire data were obtained at baseline on workplace psychosocial factors and on personal psychological distress. Follow up data at 12 months were obtained for 829 subjects (77%). One month pain prevalences were 26% (low back), 18% (shoulder), 6% (forearm), and 12% (knee). The prevalence of low back pain varied from 15% (army officers) to 57% (podiatrists). Army infantry had high rates of low back pain (33%), shoulder pain (33%), and knee pain (29%). Pain in at least one anatomical site was reported by 344 subjects (41%) of whom 127 reported pain in more than one site. Job dissatisfaction and unsatisfactory working conditions (stressful, monotonous, or uninstructional work) increased pain prevalence at all anatomical sites and psychological distress (General Health Questionnaire score >0) doubled the prevalence of pain at all sites.

Psychological distress and poor working conditions increase the likelihood of musculoskeletal pain.

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