Work in brief

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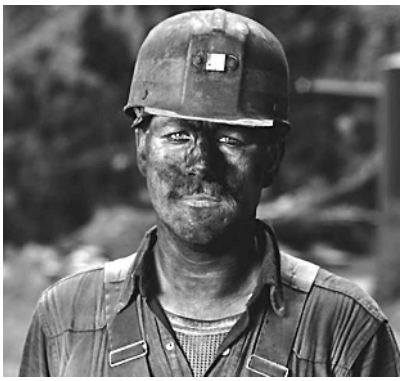
REPRODUCTIVE RISKS AMONG NAVY PERSONNEL

Military personnel may be exposed to numerous physical and chemical hazards in addition to the risks of combat. Mageroy *et al*[1] present the results of a cross-sectional study of Royal Norwegian Navy personnel undertaken after reports were received of birth defects among children whose fathers served on a ship equipped with high-frequency transmitters. On investigation, the authors found the prevalence of both congenital anomalies and perinatal death to be about four times higher in children with a parent who had served aboard the ship compared to those with parents serving elsewhere in the navy. A commentary by Chia[2] discusses the findings and concludes that a prospective study of naval service and reproductive outcomes is justified.



WORK ABILITY—MORE THAN THE OPPOSITE OF DISABILITY?

As in other branches of medical research, occupational medicine tends to focus on determinants of illness, rather than of health. In this issue Lindberg *et al*[3] use data from a prospective study of over 5000 Swedish public employees to take an unusual look at factors promoting ''excellent work ability'' (lack of both sick leave and working while sick) as well as those that prevent ''poor work ability'' (frequent sick leave). Among these mostly female workers, distinct occupational factors were associated with these two outcomes: excellent ability was predicted by favourable physical factors and role clarity, while poor ability was prevented by job security and favourable job demands and control.

PREVENTION OF LATEX ALLERGY

Observational trials can provide valuable information about the real-world effectiveness of interventions. Larese Filon and Radman[4] conducted such a study of 1040 hospital workers before and after adoption of a policy mandating use of powder-free gloves. Workers were examined and administered a questionnaire before and after the change in policy. About 6% were sensitised to latex and about 20% had symptoms of latex allergy before the change, while after the change no more workers became sensitised and most symptoms improved or disappeared. The authors conclude that a powder-free glove policy can prevent development of symptoms and allergy among workers not already sensitised.

PESTICIDES AND CHILDHOOD LEUKAEMIA

Although it is the most common cancer among children, childhood leukaemia has few established risk factors. Menegaux *et al*[5] conducted a case-control study of acute leukaemia in children under 15 to examine the possible role of exposure to pesticides. Two hundred and eighty cases and 288 controls were recruited from French hospitals and data for possible risk factors were obtained by interviewing mothers. Leukaemia was associated with home use of insecticides during pregnancy and childhood, and also with use of fungicides and treatment of pediculosis with insecticidal shampoos. A few previous studies have suggested pesticides as a risk factor for childhood leukaemia, but the association with insecticidal shampoos is novel.

1 **Mageroy N**, Mollerlokken OJ, Riise T, *et al*. A higher risk of congenital anomalies in the offspring of personnel who served aboard a Norwegian missile torpedo boat. *Occup Environ Med* 2006;**63**:92–7.
2 **Chia SE**. Congenital anomalies in the offspring of military personnel. *Occup Environ Med* 2006;**63**:82–3.
3 **Lindberg P**, Josephson M, Alfredsson L, *et al*. Promoting excellent work ability and preventing poor work ability: the same determinants? Results from the Swedish HAKuL study. *Occup Environ Med* 2006;**63**:113–20.
4 **Larese Filon F**, Radman G. Latex allergy: a follow up study of 1040 healthcare workers. *Occup Environ Med* 2006;**63**:121–5.
5 **Menegaux F**, Baruchel A, Bertrand Y, *et al*. Household exposure to pesticides and risk of childhood acute leukaemia. *Occup Environ Med* 2006;**63**:131–4.