

Employee Focus Groups Older Workers

Introduction

Thanks for taking the time to speak with us today. My name is [Insert facilitator name], and I was contracted by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) to conduct this focus group. NIOSH is a research institute that aims to better understand workplace safety and health.

We are trying to understand how to better protect and promote the health and safety of retail workers, such as yourselves, and we'd like to talk about your views and experiences related to work-related musculoskeletal disorders (WMSDs)—injuries to muscles, tendons, and nerves, such as tendonitis and carpal tunnel syndrome.

Everything said today is completely confidential, and we want to encourage you to speak openly about your ideas. Please respect each other's privacy and do not share anything that is discussed today with others outside this group.

A few things to remember:

- Participation is completely voluntary.
- The focus group will last up to 90 minutes.
- With your permission, I will tape record and take notes during the interview. This is to make sure that I capture everything that you say accurately.
- You do not have to answer any question that you don't want to, and you can stop participating at any time.
- There are no right or wrong answers. Everything you say is important. Your insights will help us better understand how to prevent WMSDs in retail sector.

Opener

Please introduce yourself, tell us your current job, and briefly describe your most recent job experience.

I. KNOWLEDGE ABOUT AND EXPERIENCE WITH WMSDs

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We'd like you to first think about the activities you perform on your job and your experiences with work related musculoskeletal disorders, or WMSDs. These are injuries such as sprains, strains, back pain, tendinitis, rotator cuff tears, or anything else that deals with muscles and other tissues. During our discussion today, we'll refer to these injuries as muscle and joint pain.

1. What do you think about when asked about muscle and joint pain you experience on the job?

2. What recent experiences have you had with muscle and joint pain?
 - a. What was the cause of the injury? (*Probe for: lack of experience, lack of safety equipment, unsafe conditions, lack of prevention knowledge*)
 - b. How often has a lack of experience, either yours or another co-worker's, contributed to you being injured?
 - c. When have you been injured on the job (with muscle and joint pain) due to unsafe conditions?
3. In what situations are older workers most likely to experience muscle and joint pain?
 - a. How often do you think older workers like you experience muscle and joint pain on the job when compared to workers under age 40?
 - b. What do you think are some of the reasons why older workers like you might experience more frequent muscle and joint pain compared to younger workers while on the job?
 - c. What do you think are some of the reasons why older workers like you might experience different types of muscle and joint pain compared to younger workers while on the job?

II. SAFETY AND PREVENTION PERCEPTIONS

4. Based on your experience, what things do you do to prevent muscle and joint pain when on the jobsite?
 - a. What motivated you to take these steps?
 - b. What has worked well in preventing these injuries?
 - c. What has not worked well in preventing these injuries?
5. What are some of the barriers or challenges you have faced when trying to avoid muscle and joint pain at work?
 - a. How do these barriers differ based on the type of work activity you are doing on a jobsite?
 - b. In your experience, do you get enough training and information to prevent muscle and joint pain on the jobsite?
 - c. Do managers have enough training and information to help workers prevent muscle and joint pain on the jobsite?
 - i. How often do managers serve as a barrier to helping workers prevent muscle and joint pain on the job site? (*probe for: how they serve as a barrier through guidelines they enforce, not thinking safety is important, etc. as well as specific job tasks when this might occur*)
6. What are your suggestions for protecting retail workers from muscle pain and strain?

- a. How important is it to talk about procedures for lifting or handling materials safely? Why?
- b. What strategies around work organization (e.g., shift schedules, number of hours, how tasks are assigned, job rotation) are most important to prevent injuries? Why?
- c. Are there enough opportunities for workers to give feedback about these injuries and their causes on the job? Why or Why not?

III. AGING IN THE WORKPLACE

As you might know, the U.S. workforce is getting older. Also, more people are working side-by-side with workers of various age groups (Baby Boomers, Gen Xers, Millennials). We'd now like to talk about your age as it relates to your work, as well as doing work alongside people who are younger than you are.

7. Since you began working in retail sector, what changes have you experienced over the years that affect how you do your job now?
 - a. How does getting older affect how you do your job (*probe for: performing tasks, moving, handling equipment, etc.*)?
 - b. How does getting older affect the way you think about muscle pain and strain injuries at work?
 - c. What's challenging about the changes you've experienced?
 - d. How have you adapted to the changes you've experienced?
 - e. What safety skills (for preventing muscle and joint pain) do you know now that you wished you learned when you first started working in retail?
8. How would you describe the interactions you have with retail workers who are younger than you?
 - a. What are some challenges of working with younger workers?
 - b. What are some benefits of working with younger workers?
9. What perceptions or stereotypes do supervisors or other employees have of workers your age? (*probe for: more/less accident prone, too slow on the job, excellent mentors to keep others from being injured*)
 - a. How could such perceptions affect someone's work? (*Probe for: older worker internalizing stereotypes, someone more/less likely to get hurt, discrimination, etc.*)
 - b. What stereotypes might older workers have of younger ones?

IV. INFORMATION NEEDS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

10. Where do you go to get information about muscle and joint pain injuries and how to prevent them when you're on the job?
 - a. Which sources of information do you trust the most (*probe for: websites, your supervisor, training, other retail workers*)? Why?
11. What information or training would help you the most to avoid muscle and joint pain because of work?
 - a. What topics would be most important to cover?
 - b. What would make the information or training the useful for workers? What would make it easy to use)?
 - c. What is the best way for you to learn when you're being trained on the job? (*probe: taught by instructor, peer to peer, self-directed, video, hands-on demonstration/building examples*)
12. What other types of changes on the job site would help you avoid muscle and joint pain?
 - a. How would changes in the way you do your job help avoid muscle and joint pain?
 - b. In what ways would better tools/equipment help to avoid muscle and joint pain?

Wrap up

We're just about done with this session. As we wrap up, is there anything else you'd like to bring up that we haven't talked about today?