

## ***Key Findings from Research:***

# **Chronic Diseases, Aging Workers**

*Title of journal paper and authors:*

### **Chronic Diseases and Functional Limitations among Older Construction Workers in the United States: A 10-Year Follow-up Study**

Xiuwen Sue Dong, DrPH, Xuanwen Wang, PhD, Christina Daw, PhD, and Knut Ringen, DrPH –J Occup Environ Med, 2011 Apr;53(4):372-80. [View abstract.](#)

#### *Overview:*

CPWR researchers conducted a study of older construction workers over a 10-year period (1998-2008) using the Health and Retirement Study, a large, nationally representative longitudinal survey of U.S. residents over the age of 50. This study fills a current knowledge gap by examining the inter-related effects of the aging process and work-related exposures on downstream health problems among U.S. construction workers, even after they exited this industry.

#### *Key Findings:*

1. Compared with white-collar workers of the same age (50 and up), construction workers had increased risk of arthritis, back problems, chronic lung disease, functional limitations, work disability, and work-related injuries after controlling for other demographic factors such as race and education.
2. Arthritis, high blood pressure, heart problems, and diabetes ranked as top four diagnosed diseases among construction workers over age 50 at both baseline (1998) and follow-up (2008).
3. Substantial difficulty with four functional tasks (stooping/kneeling/crouching, reaching/arm extension, push/pull large objects, and lift/carry 10 lbs.) was evident among all older workers (construction workers, other blue-collar workers, and white-collar workers). However, construction workers found stooping/kneeling/crouching and arm extension to be extremely difficult.
4. Health-related problems had a large effect on an individual's ability to work; nearly 31% of construction workers over age 50 reported at baseline that their health problems limited their ability to work, and increased to more than 36% at follow-up.
5. At the 2008 follow-up, only 4.8% of construction workers were working in the same trade as reported in 1998, while 9.3% of white-collar workers were in the same line of work. Approximately 36% of both white-collar and construction workers were retired.

For more information, contact the lead author: **Sue Dong:** [sdong@cpwr.com](mailto:sdong@cpwr.com).