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ROOFERS WHO LEAVE THE TRADE ARE FOUR TIMES MORE LIKELY TO FACE ECONOMIC HARDSHIPS THAN THOSE WHO REMAIN

*Combination of poor health, musculoskeletal disorders force early retirement;
Roofers age 40-50 hit hardest with financial woes*

Researchers conducting a longitudinal study of 979 roofers between age 40-59 found that 10 percent left the roofing trade within a year, and of those leaving, 60 percent left their job due to chronic pain, work-related musculoskeletal disorders and poor health. When that group was examined in a one-year follow-up, researchers found that they were four times more likely to suffer mild economic impact, **19 times more likely to suffer moderate economic impact**, and **6.5 times** more likely to experience severe economic impact from their early retirement. Those workers younger than age 50 experienced the brunt of the economic fallout from leaving the roofing industry. These and other results of the research appeared in the July issue of the *American Journal of Industrial Hygiene*.

“We believe our research may understate the social and economic impact of injuries and diseases among aging workers in this industry,” said Laura Welch, MD, the principal investigator and lead author of the paper. “Our research drew from a population of union workers. Other research shows wage and benefit levels of non-union roofers are lower than that of union roofers, who have a retirement and disability pension system available to them.”

The researchers categorized and compared the health status of the employed and retired roofers and found those who left work during the study were older, had significantly lower physical functioning and general health scores, more bodily pain, marginally lower vitality scores, and more diagnosed musculoskeletal diseases (MSDs) and/or medical conditions, were more likely to have missed work and have more work limitations in the two years prior to the initial interview.

Roofers suffer a high rate of injury among the construction trades, and they command the third highest rate of jobsite fatalities, behind ironworkers and power installers. With the number of workers over age 55 is increasing at an annual rate of 2.5 percent and a projected shortage of skilled construction workers, the study casts an unwelcome light onto the future of the industry workforce.

“A 54-year-old worker is considered to be in his or her prime in most industries,” said Welch. “They’re knowledgeable, experienced and can serve as mentors to younger workers. But construction puts extremely high demands on the body, day after day. And workers are in high-hazard environments. When you have chronic low back pain, as many of these workers do, you’re lucky to get to work every day.”

The study's identification of risk factors for leaving the trade – age and physically demanding work – point to a need to modify work practices, a change in work organization or modifying risk factors to prevent disability and the attendant economic impact.

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