REPETITIVE STRAIN
INJURIES IN the
TEXTILE & GARMENT
INDUSTRY:
A SURVEY

#### Two Parts

☐ This project was divided into two scenarios

Survey and Results

A Training Manual

# The Partners

- General Workers' Union (Malta)
- Workers' Participation Development Centre (Malta University)
- □ University of Aquila (Italy)
- CGIL (Italy)
- bfi (Austria)
- F.I.P.A. (Netherlands)
- GFTU (England)

## Repetitive Strain Injuries

RSI is defined as that " group of injuries affecting the muscles, tendons and nerves primarily of the neck and upper limbs. It is an umbrella term and is also known as Work Related Upper Limb Disorder (WRULD) (RSI Association, UK).

# Studies indicate that in most cases these injuries are the consequences arising from a number of different factors such as:

- Work Design
  - Postures
    - Force
- Repetitive Work
  - Vibration
- Extreme Temperature
  - Visibility
  - Duration
  - Piece Work
  - Work Organisation

#### ISSUES ADDRESSED

- □ Incidence of Repetitive Movements
- Complaints on Workstation Design
- Work Tempo
- Rest Breaks
- Comments on Managerial Attitude
- Reportage of Complaints
- H & S Risks and their nature
- Attitudes to H & S illnesses
- Treatment & Diagnosis
- General Comments

## GENERAL INFORMATION (1)

306 sewing machine operators were interviewed from 8 different Textile & Garment Manufacturers

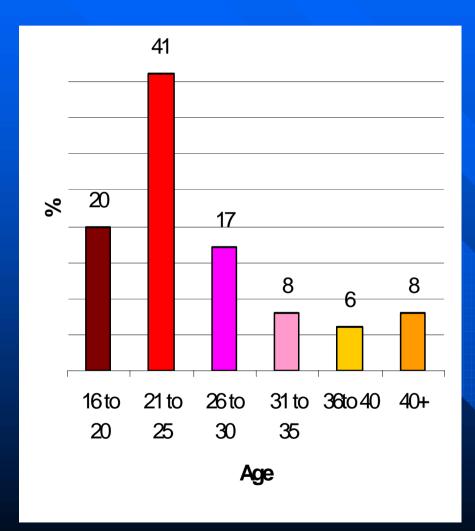
WORKFORCE PREDOMINANTLY FEMALE, SIMILAR TO THE WORKFORCE WITHIN THE INDUSTRY

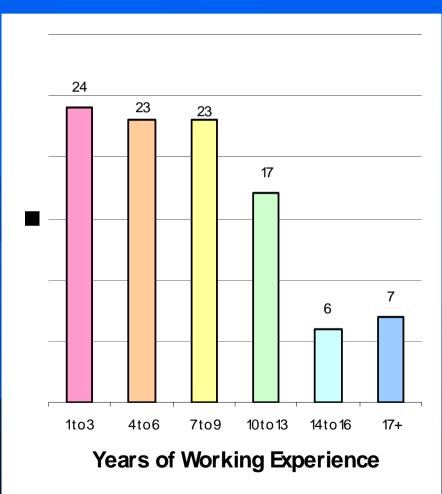
- 4 are foreign owned (ONE MULTINATIONAL)
- 4 locally owned & family run (THREE ARE EXPORT ORIENTED – ONE LOCALLY MARKET ORIENTED)

#### METHODOLOGY

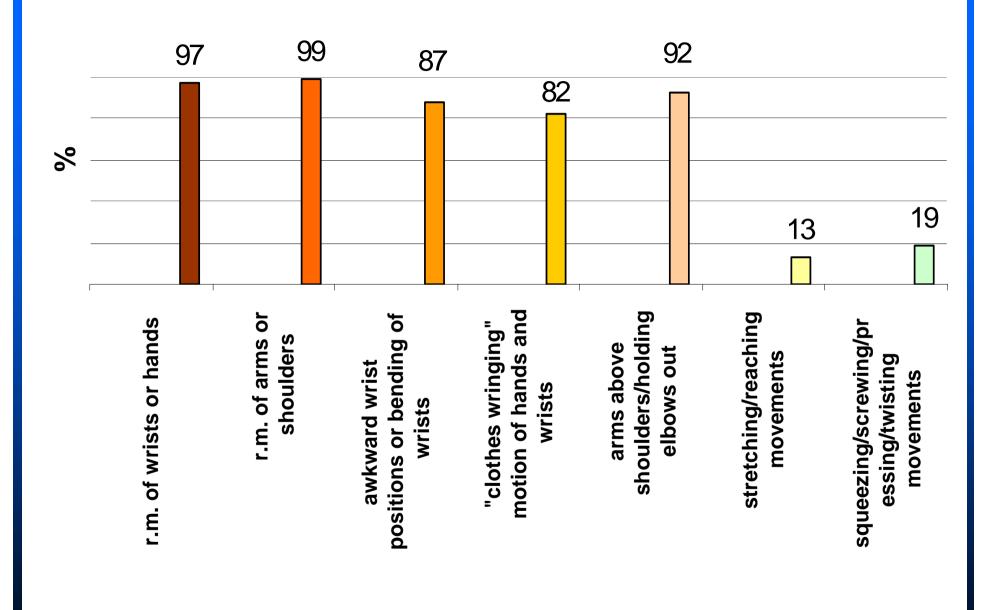
- Mixture of interview & observation on an individual basis
- Conducted on a one to one basis
- Observation was required where movements were involved
- Workers were selected randomly by management
- Workforce was predominantly female (302 out of 306) similar to the workforce within the industry

# Age & Years of Work Experience



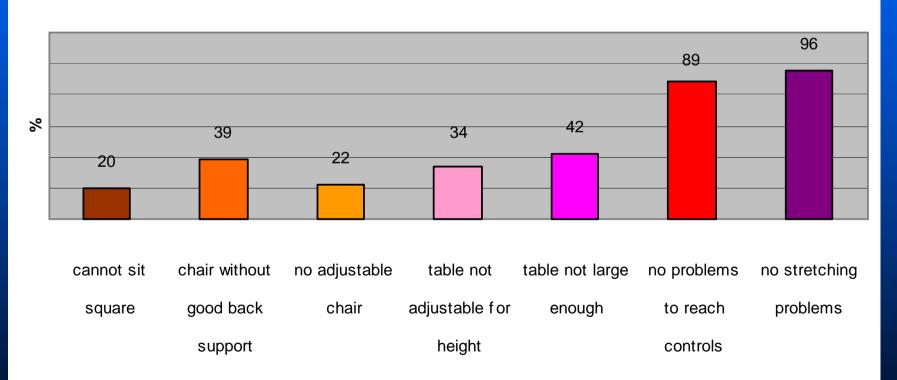


#### Type of Repetitive Movements Leading to RSI



# Complaints on WorkStation Design

#### **WorkStation Design**



**Type of Problem** 

# Work Tempo

72% of workers claim that they determine their own speed of work.

The others reported that the speed is set by management or by the machine itself.

## Break(s)

162 employees (53.1%) = 1 daily break

142 employees (46.5%) = 2 daily breaks

1 employee = No break

# Comments on Managerial Attitude General Management

- better communication & co-operation between management,
   supervisors & workers extremes in discipline
  - increase in work force -

#### **Better Working Conditions**

- wages production bonus & rates more overtime -
- more breaks better rest rooms no more than 1 operation start & finishing times -

#### **Ergonomic Improvements**

better trolleys - adjustable work tables - manual handling training -

#### **Environmental Improvements**

- cleanliness - extreme temperatures - better smoking area - cleaner air - less fluff -

### Reportage of Complaints (1)

66% claim that they did put forward their problems.

34% claim that they do not report.

# Reportage of Complaints (2)

#### Out of those reporting:

60% claim that nothing was ever done.

31% claim that too little was done.

2% claim that rarely, something was done.

1 employee said it is useless to report.

1 employee expressed her fears to do so.

Only 7 (5%) confirmed that adequate action was taken.

# Health & Safety Risks – (1)

62% believe that that there is a Health & Safety risk at their place of work.

This opinion is held mainly by the more experienced /older workers.

86% are of the opinion that these risks are affecting their health.

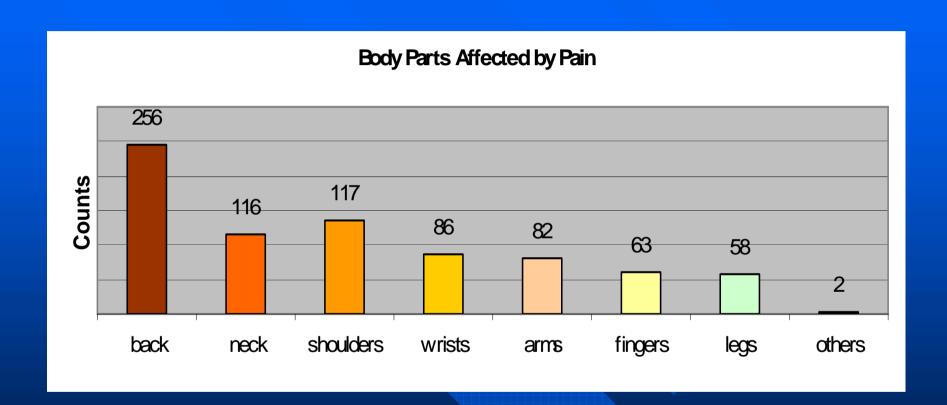
# Health & Safety Risks – (2)

83% claim to suffer from some sort of pain in their body.

70% take pain killers to cope with their work.

90% of workers claim that workmates complain of pain in parts of their body.

## Nature of Health & Safety Ills-(1)



### Nature of Health & Safety Ills-(2)

#### **SWELLINGS**

The highest rates are found in the wrists.

#### **NUMBNESS**

The fingers are the most reported to suffer from this particular kind of pain.

TINGLING / STIFFNESS / ACHES / PAIN Back = major problem.

#### Attitudes to H & S Ills

57% never visited their doctor about any of the ills described.

Some workers said that RSI is part of their job
Other workers said that they have become used
to RSI

Most of the younger workers do not seek medical advice for their health problems.

#### Treatment Prescribed

Pills & Creams Periods of Rest Massage & Physiotherapy **Vitamins** Change Work Injections **Surgical Operations** Electric shocks in Fingers Inhaler

## Diagnosis

Tiredness
Repetitive Movements
Stress
Stiffness of Muscles & Nerves
Sciatica
Bone Displacement

## A Training Manual

- At the end of the Survey a Training Manual was produced
- 1. Introduction
- 2. Curriculum
- 3. Syllabus
- 4. Education Pack
- 5. Policy Paper

#### Introduction

■ Mainly it talks about the aims of the Training Manual like learning process about the experience of course participants, with guidance and input from the tutor

### Curriculum

- Definition and Meaning of RSI
- The Challenges
- Principles
- Objectives
- Conclusion

## Syllabus

- A general introduction to H/S
- Work station design/ergonomics
- Time study and production quotas
- Risks and their nature
- Reporting of injuries & occ. Diseases
- Legal aspects
- Practical application, environment & medical protection etc.

#### **Education Pack**

- Introduction
- A core Programme of RSI
- A general overview of occ. H/S legislation
- Repetitive Strain Injuries
- Ergonomics
- Sewing machine work station design
- Manual handling
- Carpal Tunnel Syndrome
- Epicondylitis

### What is "Carpal Tunnel Syndrome"?

■ A passageway in the wrist formed by the eight carpal (twist) bones, which make up the floor and sides of the tunnel, and the transverse carpal ligament, a strong ligament stretching across the roof of the tunnel. Inside the carpal tunnel are tendons which run down from the muscles in the forearm and thumb. Also running through the tunnel is the median nerve, a cord about the size of a pencil, supplying information back to the brain about the sensations you feel in your thumb, index, middle and (occasionally) ring fingers. In the carpal tunnel syndrome the median nerve gets squeezed, often because the tendons become swollen and overfill the tunnel and this causes the symptoms described.

## What is "Epicondylitis"?

■ Is a common and well defined condition affecting the elbow. It is characterised by pain at the epicondyle, the bony parts on the inside and outside of the elbow joint. It appears under many names and is commonly known as Tennis Elbow. Epicondylitis is the result of some kind of muscle lesion or inflammation of tendons at the point where they attach to the bone. It has nothing to do with arthritis or any other diseases.

# **Policy Papeers**

- Background
- Development
- Main Points

#### Recommendations

- Our Campaign is to take 3 years
- We want action and we want also HESA to put pressure into influential quarters like ETUC where results could be achieved
- Our scope of our Campaign is to put pressure on the EU to *lighten the load*

THANK GOD,

I HAVE FINISHED!

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PERSEVERANCE