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at ways to help poultry workers reduce their rates of injury.

Though it won't be a part of this pro-ject, researchers also say that physical exams are needed to confirm the self-reported injuries, and there should be more investigation into why the reported rates vary so much among different companies.

Quandt said that the survey found high rates of musculoskeletal injuries.

"Almost half of the workers reported pain in their hands or arms during the previous month, and one in five of those workers was unable to work for at least a day in the previous year because of the pain," she said.

Forty-seven percent reported poor or fair health.

The assembly-line work and the sheer volume of chickens processed contribute to repetitive-motion injuries.

The process starts with chicken catchers, almost always men, wading into poultry houses among thousands of birds, grabbing them up and putting them in cages for the ride to the plant.

At the plant, workers lift the chick-ens onto hooks. Men and wo-men who cut and trim may make the same cutting motion up to 40,000 times a shift, according to the stu-dy. Floors are often slippery. Steam rises from the cleaning process that sprays hot water onto cold equipment. Workers who handle raw chicken in the damp environment often develop skin conditions.

Contaminants become airborne, resulting in respiratory illnesses.


Researchers say that there are a number of reasons that workers may not report injuries. They might fear for job security or have a language barrier or not know they are entitled to workers' compensation.

Management has to decide whether an injury is work-related.

A cut or other accident might be easy to spot, but it takes a medical exam to diagnose a repetitive-motion injury from making the same cuts hundreds of thousands of times over months.

The report recommends implementing OSHA's 2004 ergonomics program that is meant to help adapt the work environment to the worker. There are no regulations to enforce the OSHA ergonomic guidelines.

The researchers also recommend having worker-advocacy groups and community agencies work with poul-try-processing plants to improve worker safety and health.


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Other researchers involved in the survey were Dr. Joseph Grzywacz, Dr. Michael Coates, Antonio Marin and Dr. Thomas Arcury, all with the medical center, and Bless Burke and Lourdes Carrillo, both with Centro Latino.

The researchers say they asked the poultry companies in the survey area to participate, but the companies declined.

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