

PREVALENCE OF OCCUPATIONAL ALLERGIC DISEASES IN WORKERS INVOLVED IN ANIMAL PRODUCTION

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Working in swine and poultry farms is described as a harmful job to the workers, because it has been shown that is capable of leading to occupational asthma and other allergic diseases [1]. The main objective of this study is the epidemiological characterization of occupational allergic diseases in swine and poultry farmers.

About 37 (46.25%) workers from 7 swine and 43 (53.75%) from 7 poultries participated in this study. The data was collected through a questionnaire that is validated for Portugal by the European Community Respiratory Health Survey under the form of interview.

The prevalence of asthma was 10%, of which 50% are occupational asthma and 50% are work-aggravated asthma. Among non-asthmatic farmers, it was reported wheezing in the last year (26.39%), shortness of breath after activity (11.11%) and nocturn persistent cough (23.61%). The prevalence of allergic rhinitis was 20%, and in 25% of cases the 1st crisis occurred after the beginning of work on farms. Among farmers without medical diagnosis of rhinitis, 41.38% reported characteristic symptoms of this disease. There were skin allergies in 26 (32.50%) of the farmers, of which 20 (76.92%) were work-related.

The prevalence of asthma is quite similar to European data, with 10% of asthma in general population. However, the prevalence of occupational asthma on these farms of about 5% is at the minimum level of European data (5-10%). This study covered a specific occupational setting, unlike the European study in which different occupational settings were analyzed. Furthermore, this study suggests that the prevalence of occupational asthma may be underestimated in these settings, since non-diagnosed farmers with respiratory and allergic symptoms from occupational exposure were identified.

[1] K. Radon, et al., *Occupational and Environmental Medicine* 58, 405–410 (2001).