Relation between Diagnoses on Severity, Sick Leave, and Loss of Job among Patients with Occupational Hand Eczema


Eczema is an inflammation of the epidermis or outer layer of skin. Hand eczema from occupational causes is surprisingly common, but a serious problem. More than 20% of all affected individuals have reported taking frequent sick leave, and sometimes the condition leads to job change or unemployment. The major causes of occupational hand eczema are contact dermatitis caused by allergens or by skin irritants and atopic dermatitis, a relapsing noncontagious inflammatory skin disorder.

In this study, we assessed what proportion of occupational hand eczema was attributable to these two primary causes, as well as to other causes. Conducted in Denmark using Danish national registry data that are a widely envied resource for epidemiologic studies, this study found that both atopic dermatitis and allergic contact dermatitis, especially if resulting from exposure to skin irritants, are strongly related to the severity of eczema.

The study found that a diagnosis of contact dermatitis from an occupational irritant had a greater effect on the overall severity of occupational hand eczema than did all other diagnoses and subdiagnoses. Similarly, those with atopic dermatitis had a poor prognosis with a relatively high risk of severe occupational hand eczema and of long sick leave. In a polynomial regression model, we assessed the effects of occupational irritant contact dermatitis, atopic dermatitis, male sex, and age above 50 years and found that the effects of each of these factors was substantially greater in relation to severe occupational hand eczema than in relation to mild or moderate occupational hand eczema. The only notable association with loss of job that we found, however, was for food-related occupations.

Link: http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2133.2005.06415.x