

Headline **Jobs, professions influence cause of death**
Date **03 Aug 2010**
MediaTitle **New Sarawak Tribute**
Section **Supplement**
Journalist **N/A**
Frequency **Daily**
Circ / Read **46,471 / 164,773**

Language **English**
Page No **T6**
Article Size **232 cm²**
Color **Black/white**
ADValue **626**
PRValue **1,877**



Jobs, professions influence cause of death

WHAT a person does for a living could play in role in how they die, according to new research.

After analysing 1.6 million deaths over a decade, British scientists found that painters, bricklayers and roofers had about twice the average rate of death from drug abuse, while merchant seamen, cooks and bar staff had a higher risk of alcohol-related deaths.

And dressmakers and hairdressers had nine times the average risk of death from HIV/AIDS.

"This study demonstrates that there are major differences between occupational groups in their risk of death from drug and alcohol-related diseases," said Dr David Coggan, of the Medical Research Council in Southampton, England, who headed the research team.

Although the diseases linked to certain types of death are unlikely to be a direct consequence of work, Coggan said the study published in the journal *Occupational Medicine* could open up new methods of prevention.

"The findings are important because they indicate opportunities for targeted interventions to prevent illness and promote health," he added. "The workplace is an ideal environment to pick up on drug and alcohol problems and to put in policies to improve safety and productivity and to help workers."

Coggan and his team analysed all deaths among men and women aged 16-74 years in England and Wales during 1991-2000. They found merchant seamen had a high risk for death from cirrhosis and other alcohol related illnesses such as cancer of the liver and oral cavity and from accidents like falling down stairs.

Higher than average risk of death from HIV/AIDS was found among male tailors and dressmakers and male hairdressers, while accidental poisoning by drug was high among male painters, decorators, bricklayers, plasterers and roofers.

"Although it may not be so obvious, the workplace is also a good setting to provide health information about safe sex practice, as part of a general health promotion program," said Dr Olivia Carlton, the president of the Society of Occupational Medicine.

"This study allows us to target the high risk occupations," she added. - Reuters

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