

Gender and Fair Employment Practices: Issues in Development of Employee Selection Tests

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ABSTRACT

Equal Employment Opportunity Legislation and affirmative action are helping to integrate women into non-traditional jobs previously dominated by men. In manual materials handling jobs, there is concern that the movement of women into certain trades may not only reduce productivity, but also increase the incidence of musculoskeletal injuries. In order to assure productivity based on job demands while reducing any possible physical harm created by mismatching of worker and job, the ergonomics literature provides two suggestions: (1) ensure that task demands match the abilities of the person performing the work; or (2) hire workers with the strength or capacity to perform the job.

Selection tests are one strategy employees use to have some assurance that the employee can maintain a certain productivity level while maintaining a reduced risk of injury. In Canada, selection tests are regulated by a subsection of the Canadian Charter of Human Rights under bona fide occupational selection test for Canada are: (1) identification of the occupational requirements or essential components of the job; (2) determination of selection test items; (3) establishment of predictive relationships between occupational tasks and selection tests; (4) determination of a selection standard of cut-off score; and (5) validation of the proposed selection standards.

Although a job demands analysis, scientific approach, and minimal acceptable criteria are required by law, this does not guarantee fair employment practices. Physically demanding jobs are particularly problematic in setting gender-fair standards, because of the disparity in Anthropometry, strength, and endurance between men and women. It is therefore important to initiate a dialogue among researchers, industry, and government to allow the process of developing physical selection tests to proceed toward gender-fair employment practices.