

# Prevalence of Respiratory Symptoms Among Sisal Processors in Tanzania

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## Abstract

Respiratory health among sisal workers has been an unresolved issue of concern for many years. The authors performed a 1-week follow-up questionnaire study on acute respiratory symptoms and cross-shift peak expiratory flows among 163 sisal brushing and decortication workers (exposed participants) and 31 security workers (control participants) from 6 sisal estates in Tanzania. The authors used the Optimal Symptom Score Questionnaire on Acute Respiratory Symptoms and the standardized American Thoracic Society and British Medical Research Council respiratory questionnaires. Decortication and brushing workers had a higher prevalence and higher severity scores of acute symptoms throughout the week than did control participants. Shortness of breath among brushing workers decreased ( $p < .01$ ) from 39% on Monday to 20% on Friday. Brushing workers also had significantly higher prevalence of chronic sputum (30%) and chest tightness (48%) and the lowest preshift and postshift PEF values. The authors recommend preventive measures and further research.

**Keywords:** peak expiratory flow respiratory symptoms severity score, sisal