

HEALTH AND SAFETY CHALLENGES OF WORKERS IN FACTORIES IN PAKISTAN AND THE ROLE OF HEALTH DEPARTMENT: A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY

Robia Shaheen

Lecturer

Department of Geography.

University of the Punjab

Lahore

Abstract

In Pakistan thousands of workers are routinely exposed to hazards in textile industry. There are different hazards faced by the workers of textile industry. There are different factors, which are responsible to create the hazards in the working environment. In textile these are Physical, Biological, Chemical and Ergonomic (personal) factors. There are some other aspects, which are responsible to create hazards in the work place environment i.e. shift work, smoking at work place, job strained proper use of personal protective equipments etc. The introduction of hazards technologies in industry has resulted in high accident rates, occupational diseases, and unhealthy working environments. Most workers are illiterate and do not know what protective measures should be adopted for their jobs. Most of the workforce is not prepared to cope with the hazards posed by manufacturing and industrial processes. The present study was designed to know the role of hazards control measures in Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) in textile industry. Multistage random sampling technique was used to select the 480 permanent workers respondents between the ages 30-55. Uni-variate and Bi-variate analysis shows a strong and positive association. The study proposed that awareness about hazards should improve occupational health and safety.

Keywords: health and safety, protective equipments, hazardous chemicals, textile industry, workplace environment

Introduction

The incidence of occupational diseases and injuries are very high in Pakistan because thousands of workers are routinely exposed to hazardous chemicals. It is well known that healthy workers are most productive. The introduction of hazards technologies in industry has resulted in high accident rates, occupational diseases, and unhealthy working environments. Most workers are illiterate and do not know what protective measures should be adopted for their jobs.

Most of the workforce is not prepared to cope with the hazards posed by manufacturing and industrial processes. The country lacks the basic infrastructure and qualified personal for providing occupational health and safety services to the workforce. Thus, a huge number of workers will be at risk if no future attempts are made to improve OH&S (Ahsan and Partanen, 2001). The use of proper lighting system is very essential in stitching units. This will better prevent our workforce against many eye diseases. Workplace conditions are so unhygienic as a result workers suffer from allergies, skin rashes and other skin diseases. The ventilation system in these stitching units of textile factories is contracting to respiratory problems and diseases (Rana, 2005). The use of chemicals in manufacturing and industrial processes has expanded considerably in recent years in both the industrialized and the developing countries. Massive occupational and environmental problems are being faced resulting from the production, use, storage, transport, handling and disposal of chemicals.

Currently, there are more than eight million known chemicals. Electrical current exposes workers to a serious, widespread occupational hazard; practically all members of the workforce are exposed

to electrical energy during the performance of their daily duties, and electrocutions occur to workers in various job categories.

Many workers are unaware of the potential electrical hazards present in their work environment, which makes them more vulnerable to the danger of electrocution. Some health problems are also caused by noise or high temperature. Noise induced hearing loss is a frequent finding among workers in noisy workplaces. Heat stress may be dangerous in it and may also predispose workers to other conditions. In hot environments it may be impossible to wear protective clothing, and consequently exposure to other hazards may occur. Under-diagnosis and under-reporting of occupational diseases lead to the belief that these are minor problems. Hazards in the workplace are often caused by the use of materials, tools, machinery and chemicals.

The present study is oriented to explore problems, needs and the factors which are responsible to maintain occupational health and safety of the workers in textile industry. It can be helpful in formulating programme and policy to solve the problems related to the health and safety of textile workers.

Based upon the above discussion and facts, the following objectives have been formulated for the present research: (1) to detect the work hazards related to the working environment, (2) to investigate the factors effecting occupational health and safety in textile industry and (3) to identify the major causes of industrial accidents.

Materials and methods

Textile is the major manufacturing sector in Pakistan employing the greatest number of employed labour force in the manufacturing sector. As cotton is a major crop in Pakistan, the textile industry has developed as a response to the availability of the raw material. The Textile sector comprised highest number of enterprises, 2304, which employed highest number of workers i.e. 245596 (Pakistan Labour Gazette, 2001).

The introductions of modern but hazardous technologies in the industries have resulted in high rates of accidents, occupational diseases and unhealthy working environment. Pakistan lags in the enabling legislation in the area of occupational safety and health, the infrastructure to promote and enforce occupational safety and health are inadequate. A large proportion of the workforce is illiterate (thus unaware of the dangers of processes and products with which they deal) (Awan, 2002).

The study was conducted in Faisalabad district of the Punjab for being famous for its textile industries. According to the distribution of economic activities and corresponding labour force in different geographical locations the highest number of textile industry situated in Faisalabad (Awan, 2002). This study was conducted in urban and rural areas of the district.

References

- Ahasan, M.R. and D. Imbeau. 2003. Work-related research, education and training in developing countries. *Int J. Occup. Saf Ergon* 9(1): 103-114.
- Ahasan, M.R. and T. Partanen. 2001. Occupational health and safety in the least developed countries— a simple case of neglect. *J. Epidemiol.* 11(2): 74- 80.
- Awan, S. 2002. The development trends of occupational health services in Pakistan—Current status and future perspective.
- World Health Organization, Eastern Mediterranean Regional Office, Cairo, Egypt. Beth-Hubner, M. 1999. International trends and concerns to chemical safety.

Int. Arch. Occup. Environ. Health 72(3): 75-90. Karaguven, U.H.M. 1999. The Relationship Between Work Accident, Educational Backgrounds and Stress Levels of Textile Workers. 22-25 Sep.1999.

Paper presented at the European Conference on Educational Research, Lahti, Finland. Metgud, D.C., S. Khatri, M.G. Mokashi and P.N. Saha. 2008.

An ergonomic study of women workers in a woollen textile factory for identification of healthrelated problems. Indian Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine 12(1): 14-19.

Pakistan Labour Gazette. 2001. Government of Pakistan, Ministry of Labour, Manpower and Overseas Pakistanis, Islamabad, Pakistan. Rana, I.M. 2005.

Work places in industries. The daily Dawn. p.18. Saleema, B.S., A. Sajeela, S. Ayseha, A.F. Ilyas and K. Nikhat. 2007.

Determination of cotton dust concentration in different textile mill in Faisalabad and Prognostic evaluation of Byssinosis in its workers. www.iepkc.org (retrieved by on March 13, 2008). Sheikh, G.H. 1996.

Noise problem in a polyester fiber plant in Pakistan. Ind. Health 34(4): 427-431. Zafar, Z.H. 2000. Health Services Academy, Islamabad. The Present Status and Requirement for Occupational Safety Research.