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Original Research

The Impact of Occupational Health and Safety Practices on Job Performance of Operational Level Employees: A Study in the Construction Industry, Sri Lanka

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Abstract

In the modern developing business world, a significant increase in Health and Safety Practices can be identified. Occupational accidents in factories and working sites make substantial challenges to survive. Hence, this study aims to determine the impact of occupational health and safety practices on the job performance of operational level employees in the construction industry, Sri Lanka. The study was carried out among a sample of 100 operational level employees in selected construction sites in Sri Lanka. The study provided a comprehensive questionnaire to assess the impact of health and safety on the job performance of the operational level employees by using random sampling technique. Secondary data were used from company past data and information, web site, journals, and subject-related books such as company health and safety procedures, health and safety training, and accident records. Data analysis was done by using SPSS. The study found a positive impact of occupational health and safety practices on the job performance of operational level employees in the construction industry.

Keywords: Occupational Health, Occupational Safety, Job Performance, Operational Level Employees, Construction Industry, Sri Lanka.

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Introduction

A significant increase in Health and Safety Practices (HSP) can be identified in the modern developing business world. Recent occupational accidents in factories make substantial challenges to survive. Increasing industrialisation and its consequent make more industrial accidents and greater exposure to dangerous chemicals, directly impacting employees' health and safety. Therefore, managing health and safety issues of organizations regarding human resources has become one of the most critical consideration in Human Resource Management (HRM).

According to Opatha (2009), Human Resource Management (HRM) plays a vital role in achieving an organisation's goals through efficient and effective utilisation of human resources. To manage human resources effectively, organisations are implementing various kinds of practices and policies. HSP is such kind of practice used to manage human capital effectively and efficiently within any organisation. According to Opatha (2009), health and safety management means all the activities involved in protecting and promoting the employees' physical and mental health, which enable them to perform jobs efficiently and effectively.

Occupational health and safety issues are related to short-term physical injuries, and occupational hazards that source serious long-term ignored health problems. Some of them are neurologic, hypertension, cancer, and cardiovascular diseases, which cause due to occupational hazards (Greepherson, 2013). If organisations fail to provide enough protection from various hazards for their employees, the employees' attitude toward the organisation will be bad. As a result, their commitment level to the organisation is also going to reduce. Many employees have less job performance due to stressful working environments. With that, individuals failed to meet their daily job demands appropriately (Fritz & Sonnentag, 2005). It means an unhealthy work environment, directly and indirectly, impact employees' performance.

According to Brunette (2004), construction workers perform several physically demanding tasks with varying types and levels of exposures. Also, due to advances in technology, most of the tasks on a construction site have been replaced with more powerful, complex tools and machinery. Thus, the adaptation of proper technological health and safety mechanism is required with the management's attention on upgrading required technology, rather than investing in the latest technologies (Samarasinghe & Karunarathne, 2015).

If employees are working in high-risk workplaces exposed to hazardous chemicals, materials, and cognitively challenging work, job demands may create unexpected outcomes for employees, such as workplace accidents, injuries, and fatalities (Nahragang et al., 2010). If an organization is unable to cope with poor working conditions such as health and safety issues, workers are more likely to find it costlier to stay in the company than to leave the company (Sinclair et al., 2005). Therefore, it causes to decrease in the performance level of every employee in any organisation. This study aims to identify that problem in depth.

Study Background

Human resources are the most valuable resource in organisations. Therefore, it is essential to maintain a healthy workforce to enhance the wealth of the organisation. In recent years, some workers have been temporarily or permanently disabled due to occupational accidents due to insufficient safety knowledge regarding the handling of machinery and equipment and neglecting to work with simple procedures. Organizations want to develop and implement better HSP to protect the employees' lives and enhance organizational profit while complying with the legal requirement. Thus, organizations' ultimate target is to achieve their goals through improving employees' job performance.

Compared with different types of industries, the construction industry is one of the major industries subjected to massive health and safety problems. Construction industry links with a dangerous work environment which causes many work-related hazards, injuries, and diseases for the employees compared with other industries. As a result, such working environments are caused to reduce employee performance. One of the major reasons for that kind of injuries is the lack of strong health and safety practices. Unavailability of solid health and safety practices usually leads to many accidents, injuries, and diseases and reduces employees' job satisfaction. Finally, it causes to reduce employees' performances towards the organization. Conversely, enterprises are taken many actions to reduce the significant impact on employees from workplace hazards, work-related injuries, and work-related diseases to increase the performance of their employees.

Due to rapid advancements and dynamics in the technological environment, the necessity of sound and strong health and safety practices is a significant component in any organisation in the construction industry. But unfortunately, little attention has been given to studying the impact of health safety on operational level employees' job performance in Sri Lanka's construction industry. Specially in Sri Lanka, there is a gap in the empirical and theoretical knowledge available, concerning the impact of health and safety practices on job performance. Due to the higher risky working environment in the construction industry, this gap is clearly visible in the Sri Lankan context.

Hence, this study targets to identify the implications of health and safety practices on job performance of operational-level employees in the construction industry, Sri Lanka.

Literature review

The World Health Organization has defined health as a "state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity". According to Mathis and Jackson (1988), health refers to a "general state of physical, mental, and emotional well-being". Health can be broadly defined as a condition without physical and mental problems that affect general and specific activities (Opatha, 2009). Further, health can be defined as a complete physical and mental well-being of all employees in the organization (Dwomoh et al., 2013).

Bokinni (2006) described safety as "a control of recognized hazards to attain an acceptable level of risk". Safety means freedom from injury, loss and risk (Aswathappa, 2004). Further, the author has noted employee safety as protecting workers from the danger of industrial accidents. Safety is a factor beyond the control of hazards, and in

most cases safety is considered the process of avoiding and preventing accidents. Safety is about avoiding accidents and minimizing damage to people and property.

Gallagher et al. (2001) described Occupational Health and Safety Management Systems (OHSMS) as a combination of planning and review, organizational management structures, consultation, and particular program aspects that work together in an integrated manner to improve health and safety performance.

As per the University of South Wales (2016), the objectives of HSP ensure the employees' life security through preventing severe injuries, hazards, and fatalities or reducing illness and injuries frequently, comply with the rules and regulations that are imposed by health and safety legislation and other government institutes. Some organizations are implementing HSP to comply with a minimum legal requirement, to enhance company reputation in society. Nevertheless, organisations can't survive in the competitive market without their focus on implementing HSP. But according to the review of the University of South Wales, objective is not only adequate. But also, HSP should enhance employee well-being and provide a contribution to the sustainability of a healthier workforce.

Thames Water Company (2016-2017) stated the three main objectives of HSP. Those are zero harm, zero accidents, and zero compromises. Zero harm means machineries; equipment and processors should not be damaged or injure employees. It identifies the risk-related issues in the workplace and places the appropriate control mechanism according to the standards. Here the target is to prepare and take controlling action to avoid dangerous hazards.

Performance is defined by Campbell and Wiernik (2015) as "behavior." It is something that the employee does that distinguishes performance from results. Outcomes are influenced by a variety of factors, including an individual's performance. Additionally, when defining performance as behavior, the researcher has allowed for exceptions. For example, performance does not always have to be readily observable individual behaviors. It can be made up of mental outputs such as responses or decisions.

Many academics have looked at employee job performance in prior years as part of their research. Task performance and contextual performance are two types of employee behavior that are required for organizational productivity, according to Borman and Motowidlo (1993).

Performance of employees is affected by numerous factors at the workplace. It is defined as performing the job tasks according to the prescribed job description (Saeed et al., 2013). The art of accomplishing a task within the set parameters is known as performance. Employee performance is influenced by a variety of things. Their emotional tie to the company and the perceived financial worth of staying with the company have an impact on their work performance (Karunarathne & Wickramasekara, 2020). Employee performance is also influenced by the manager's attitude, the organization's culture, personal difficulties, job content, and financial rewards (Saeed et al., 2013).

Employees' job performance suffers as a result of workplace health hazards, such as noise, which causes headaches and breathing problems, or the fear of coming into contact with such items, which can lead to long-term health problems. This means that creating a healthy and safe workplace helps the employer by improving employee performance. This has been confirmed by Francis (2011) by concluding "unhealthy work environment is a concern to us all". Productivity will suffer if people are unable to function well at work due to persistent headaches, wet eyes, breathing issues, or fear of exposure to materials that may create long-term health concerns. As a result, promoting a healthy work atmosphere is not only ethical, but also beneficial to the employer.

Job performance is likely to improve if an organization has occupational health and safety because high-quality occupational health and safety provides employees with a secure workplace, which improves their confidence and yield; thus, their job performance should improve if their efficiency and morale are improving, as stated by Amponsah-Tawiah and Dartey-Bawiah (2011). Workers who are aware of their job's health and safety standards and procedures, as well as the tools they utilize, are able to operate more effectively and efficiently, resulting in improved employee performance (Hudson, 2012).

The physical health of employees can be negatively affected on the performances of the particular employees. When employee performances are getting to decrease, it will be affecting the overall organizational performances as well as a negative way. Health Hazards are typically associated with chemical, physical, biological or psychological components (Francis, 2011).

Numbers of occupational infections and injuries affecting on the workforce in the construction industry and leading to decrease the performances due to those affects (Kalatpour, & Khavaji, 2016). As they explained, when employees are employed in an unpleasant working environment, the level of working intentions of relevant employees are negatively affected, and it causes to reduce the employee performance levels too. Occupational diseases occur when the workforce is exposed to workplace hazards. Most probably the impacts of those diseases will be a source of future diseases of the relevant employees (WHO, 2011). As Katsuro et al. (2010) explained, substantial links can be identified between the implementation of health programs and employee work performances.

Methodology

Research Framework

The study framework primarily depicts the relationship between the independent variable (Occupational Health and Safety) and the dependent (job performance). The research framework is based on the literature that has been cited. The research problems are framed so that the operational definitions of the concepts can be identified.

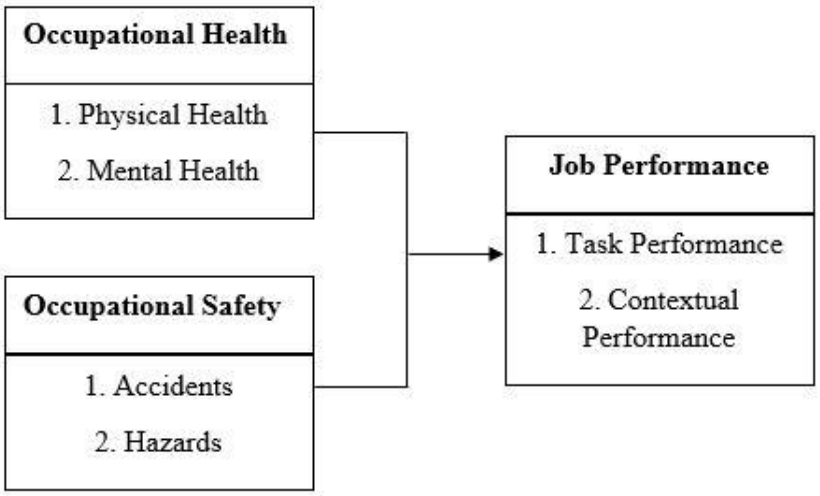

Figure 1. Research Framework

Study design

The goal of the study was to determine the impact of health and safety procedures on job performance among operational-level employees in Sri Lanka's construction industry. This research was carried out in a natural setting in medium-sized construction enterprises where events often occur in a non-scripted manner. The data for the study were collected over a specific time period, and there were no plans to continue the research after that. As a result, this research was cross-sectional. Individuals working in the construction business in Sri Lanka are the study's analytical unit.

Measures

Analysis of this study was done using primary and secondary data. Primary data was collected by conducting a survey through a designed structured questionnaire consisting three parts. Measurement scales were developed by referring to the previous studies in similar study contexts.

To make it easy for the respondent to answer, the questionnaire was divided into several sections. Part 1 was included items to measure occupational health. The measurement scale was adopted referring to several studies, the Medical Outcomes Trust, Health Assessment Lab, and Quality Metric Incorporated (2011), Infinite Fitness Ltd (2007), National Institute of Environmental Health Science (2013). The measurement scale of occupational safety at the workplace was developed mainly referring to a five-item measurement scale initially developed by Milijic et al. (2013). Another six items were included in the model to gain further information related to occupational safety and make them more evident to the audience by referring to the recent findings in similar fields.

A measurement scale for job performance was developed by referring to the scale developed by Befort & Hattrup (2003) and Alibegovic et al. (2009). The expanded scale was consisted of eight items and placed in the second section of the questionnaire.

On the other hand, the last part of the survey instrument targeted to gather general information from respondents. These were included information about gender, age, marital status, education, monthly income, and experience of responding employees. Further, journal articles, books, and relevant websites were referred to gather required secondary data for this study. Referred items to measure selected variables are shown in below Table 1.

Table 1. Operationalisation of Occupational health

Variable	Dimensions	Indicators
Occupational Health	Physical Health	Body Pain, Exercise, Injury, Meal
	Mental Health	Emotional, Stress, Discourage, Challenge, Religion
Occupational Safety	Accidents	Training, Concentrate, Action, Prevention, Supervisor
	Hazards	Fire, Noise, Financial Problem, Personal Problem
Job Performance	Task Performance	Quality Satisfaction Priority Time
	Contextual Performance	Ability Supervisor Decision Procedures

Validity and Reliability

The Cronbach's Alpha test was used to assess the inter-item consistency reliability. A sufficient reliability level was attained by the analysis, and the Cronbach's alpha test result is shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Cronbach's Alpha Coefficients

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	No. of Items
Occupational Health	0.718	16
Occupational Safety	0.721	11
Job Performance	0.714	8

Findings and Discussion

According to descriptive statistical analysis, there was no female labour participation at the operational level in the construction industry in Sri Lanka. Based on the age distribution of the respondents, the highest representation of the age categories were the ages between 31 – 35 and 36 – 40, which indicated 30% each, and 20 – 25 and 26 -30, which indicated 17% and 12% respectively. The lowest age representations within the construction industry were the age groups above 40 and below 20, which showed 10 % and 1% accordingly.

The marital status distribution of the respondents indicated that 92% of employees represent the married category. Based on the education distribution of the respondents, the majority of operational employees in the construction industry, which represent 62% are non-educated. 15%, 12% and 11% of operational employees within the construction

industry belong to the education status up to grade 8, the ordinary level examination passed, and between grade 8 and 11 accordingly. When it comes to monthly salary distribution, all operational-level employees in the construction industry earn more than 20,000 Sri Lankan rupees. According to work experience distribution, the majority of operational level employees that represent 53% are between 6-10 years of experience. 39% of respondents were below five years of work experience, and the least work experience level of operational level employee group represented 8% of the sample, and they belong to the 11 to 15 years of experience group.

The frequency distribution analysis was made individually for occupational health and safety practices and job performance variables. The frequency distribution result has been interpreted mainly considering the skewness and kurtosis of the distribution. Table 3 represents the descriptive analysis of these three variables. Further, through this analysis, the normality of the data set was identified, which led to further investigation.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics

	Health	Safety	Performance
Mean	63.9800	44.2600	33.8800
Median	65.0000	45.0000	35.0000
Std. Deviation	6.03354	5.06647	37.00
Variance	36.404	25.669	3.51987
Skewness	-.083	-.588	12.389
Std. Error of Skewness	.241	.241	-.572
Kurtosis	-.886	-.481	.241
Std. Error of Kurtosis	.478	.478	-.162
Minimum	52.00	32.00	.478
Maximum	77.00	53.00	24.00

According to descriptive analysis results, the mean value variation between 57.98 (63.98-6.0) and 69.98 (63.98+6.0) implies the overall occupational health practices of the operational level employees in the construction industry are at a moderate level. Moreover, similar results were obtained for the overall occupational safety practices of the operational level employees in the construction industry. As per the test results, the mean value can be varied between 39.26 (44.26-5.0) and 49.26 (44.26+5.0). Further, these results indicate a moderate level overall occupational and safety practices of the operational level employees in the construction industry.

The survey data analysis identified a significant positive relationship between occupational health and job performance. In other words, it implies that occupational health highly impacts the increase or conduct job performance of the operational level employees in the construction industry in Sri Lanka. According to Table 4, Pearson's correlation coefficient (r) between the above two variables is 0.596 at a significant level of 0.01, indicating a significant strong positive relationship between occupational health and job performance. Accordingly, the researcher can reject the null hypothesis while accepting the alternative hypothesis.

Further, according to the survey results, there is a significant positive relationship between occupational safety practices and job performance. this explains the implications of occupational safety practices to increase or conduct job performance of the operational level employees in the construction industry in Sri Lanka. According to Table 4, Pearson's correlation coefficient (r) between the above two variables is 0.291 at a significant level of 0.01, indicating a significant strong positive relationship between occupational safety practices and job performance. Thus, the null hypothesis of not having a significant relationship can be rejected.

Table 4. Correlation Analysis of Occupational health, Occupational safety and Job performance

Occupational health	Pearson Correlation	.596**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	100
Occupational safety	Pearson Correlation	.291**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.003
	N	100

Regression analysis measures the strength of a relationship between the independent variable and dependent variable. It explains the relationship between occupational health (mental health and physical health), occupational safety (independent variables), and job performance (dependent variable). Table 5 indicates the results of the regression analysis.

Table 5. Analysis of Physical health, Mental health, Occupational safety and Job Performance

Factor	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Beta	Sig.
Mental health	.279a	.078	.069	.279	.005
Physical health	.709a	.502	.497	.709	.000
Occupational safety	.291a	.085	.075	.291	.003

According to Table 5, 7% of the variance in mental health can be predicted from job performance. Beta value (β=0.279) represents the average amount the job performance increases when the mental health increases. There is a positive impact of mental health on job performance among operational-level employees in the construction industry.

And also, 50% of the variance in physical health can be predicted from job performance. The value of R-square was 0.502, while the value of Adjusted R-square was 0.497. There is no greater difference between R-square and Adjusted R-square. As well as beta value (β=0.709) represents the average amount the job performance increases when the physical health increases. There is a positive impact of physical health on job performance among operational-level employees in the construction industry.

According to the survey data, occupational safety and job performance have a positive impact. Further, 8% of the variance in occupational safety can be predicted from job performance. Beta value (β=0.291) represents the average amount the job performance

increases when the occupational safety rises. There is a positive impact of occupational safety on job performance among operational-level employees in the construction industry.

It was found that there is a strong positive relationship between occupational health and safety practices and job performance of operational-level employees in the construction industry in Sri Lanka. The correlation between occupational health and job performance was 0.596, which is significant at 0.000 levels. This correlation was found to be strong as it is more than the lower bound of strong correlation (0.5). The correlation between occupational safety practices and job performance was 0.291, which is significant at 0.003 levels.

There is a positive impact of mental health on job performance among operational level employees in the construction industry with β value is the 0.279 (β=0.279) which represents the average amount the job performance increases (dependent variable) when the mental health (independent variable) increases. And also, there is a positive impact of physical health on job performance among operational level employees in the construction industry with β value is the 0.709 (β=0.709), which represents the average amount the job performance increases (dependent variable) when the physical health (independent variable) increases. Further, this study found that there is a positive impact of occupational safety on job performance among operational level employees in the construction industry with β value is the 0.291 (β=0.291) which represents the average amount the job performance increases (dependent variable) when the occupational safety (independent variable) increases.

By findings of correlation and regression analysis empirically confirm Kaynak et al (2016) argument. They argued that occupational health and safety practices are major factors of determining job performance, leading to an increase in job performance.

Conclusion

As indicated by the empirical data, occupational health and safety practices depended on the job performance of the operational level employees in the constructions industry in Sri Lanka. The construction industry's occupational health and safety practices are high, and the job performance of the operational level employees is better. According to behavior of these two variables, the physical health, mental health, accidents, hazards (Independent variable) of the construction industry positively impacts the task performance and contextual performance. Therefore, occupational health and safety practices highly affect the job performance of operational level employees in the constructions industry in Sri Lanka.

Limitations and study forward

The study was carried out to inspect the impact of occupational health and safety practices on the job performance of operational level employees in the construction industry, Sri Lanka. The tested model considers occupational health and safety practices as the independent variable while job performance as dependent variable.

According to the survey, occupational health and safety practices are broadly impact job performance. But there may be other factors that can affect the job performance of the operational level employees in Sri Lanka's construction industry.

The information gained from this study can assist managers and leaders, especially human resource managers, to better understand the impact of occupational health and safety practices on job performance.

The generalizability of this study results is limited by the response rate and the sample being focused only on operational level employees in the constructions industry, Sri Lanka. Job performance of all employees, including executive, non-executive and casual workers, depends on occupational health and safety practices. But the researcher has carried the survey by gathering data of only operational level employees. As well as the research study analysis was done by referring only to a sample of the operational level employees in the constructions industry from a selected district. Further, this study analysis was entirely conducted by referring to the survey data, which may not perfectly interpret actual results than other data collection tools.

The current study should be duplicated in other employee categories in the same sector as well as in other Sri Lankan industries. Because this study focused on industrial employees, the researcher recommends that a similar study be conducted for employees in the service sector. Other jobs or industries should be included in future studies.

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