**WOMEN’S UNIVERSITY IN AFRICA**



*Addressing gender disparity and fostering equity in university education*

**FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND GENDER DEVELOPMENT STUDIES**

NAME OF COURSE: INDUSTRIAL SOCIAL WORK

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PROGRAMME: BACHELOR OF SCIENCE HONOURS DEGREE IN SOCIAL WORK

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NAME OF LECTURER: Ms. P Tendengu

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QUESTION: Occupational health safety

MARKER’S COMMENTS: …………………………………………………

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INTRODUCTION

Occupational safety and health refers to the practices and policies aimed at ensuring a healthy and safe working environment. It is a critical aspect of industrial social work focusing on protecting worker’s physical and mental well-being in the workplace. The aim is to prevent workplace injuries, illnesses and fatalities so as to promote a safe and healthy work environment for all employees through identification of potential hazards and risks as well as taking appropriate measure to control or eliminate them.

KEY ASPECTS

A key aspect of occupational safety and health is hazard identification and risk assessment. This includes identifying hazards such as potential sources of harm in the workplace including physical, chemical and biological. Risk assessment is also done to evaluate the likelihood and severity of harm from identified hazards so as to prioritize control measures. This is done through regular inspections, audits and employee inputs.

Preventive measures are another key aspect of occupational safety and health. Putting precautions in place to reduce or eliminate occupational hazards is a preventive measure. To lower the risk of disease or injuries this can comprise of engineering controls which is the modification of equipment, administrative controls which are the policies and procedures implemented to minimize exposure for instance job rotation or training and providing personal protective equipment such as safety gear like helmets, googles and boots to protect employees.

Training and education is an aspect of occupational safety and health. Ensuring that employees are trained of safe work practices and aware of workplace hazards is vital. Emergency preparedness is part of this as creation and execution of emergency response plans to handle mishaps, injuries and other serious situations that can arise at work is important for the safety and health of employees. This includes educating staff members on emergency protocols and holding drills to gauge readiness.

Monitoring and reporting is also a vital key aspect of occupational safety and health. Regular health checkups to monitor employees exposed to specific hazards needs to be done and this is considered health surveillance. Establishing systems for reporting incidents and injuries is crucial so as to identify trends and prevent reoccurrence

BENEFITS OF OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY

Occupational health and safety offers numerous benefits which include increased productivity. Productivity suffers whenever an employee is hurt and unable to work again. Hiring and training a successor then takes time away from the operations of the workplace. Additionally, there might be need to temporarily halt operations if any equipment was destroyed in the event. Thus a safe and healthy workplace boosts employee morale and motivation leading to higher productivity levels and reduced absenteeism.

Enhancement of reputation is also a benefit of occupational safety and health. This is in the sense that organizations that value health and safety are more likely to retain employees as workers feel valued and protected. It is also a standard of quality that is recognized across the world and will assist to distinguish the organization from its rivals. Thus effective occupational safety and health measures enhance reputations of organizations.

Another benefit of occupational health and safety is reduction of workplace injuries and illnesses. Effective occupational safety and health measures lead to fewer accidents and health issues resulting in a safe working environment.

Cost savings can be a benefit of occupational safety and health. This is in the view that through effective implementation of occupational safety and health measures costs can be reduced. These comprise of costs associated with medical care, worker’s compensation and lost productivity. Hence cost savings being a benefit of occupational health and safety.

KEY ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES IN OCCUPATONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH

Initially, employers hold the most significant responsibility in occupational safety and health. This is because they have control over the workspace environment. They must assess risks, implement preventive measures and ensure that their cooperations comply with national safety regulations as according to Mapuvire, Chilunjika and Mutasa (2022). For instance, at Zimplats, one of Zimbabwe’s leading platinum mining companies, management enforces strict safety measures such as regular equipment checkups, dust control systems and underground emergency drills to prevent mining accidents. In one notable case the company invested in remote controlled drilling machines to reduce the risk of injury to workers in unstable areas underground. Such practical steps show how employers can use innovation and resources to protect their employees.

Employees too play a vital role in maintaining a safe workspace. They are expected to follow safety instructions, report hazards and use protective equipment properly. A good example can be found at Delta Beverages where factory workers are trained to wear safety boots, gloves and ear protection while operating machinery. A worker who notices a leaking chemical pipe and immediately reports it to the supervisor may prevent a potential fire or explosion. This simple act of responsibility by an employee demonstrates how alertness and compliance can save lives and protect property.

Occupational safety and health professionals are essential in enforcing and improving safety standards in the workplace. Their job is to identify hazards, conduct safety and training and ensure legal compliance as stipulated by Shabani, Jerie and Shabani (2023). As an example in construction projects managed by China Harbor Engineering Company in Zimbabwe, occupational safety and health officers conduct weekly safety briefings with workers and conduct random safety audits on site. this prevents serious accidents and highlights the proactive nature of occupational safety and health professionals.

Government authorities also have a central role in promoting occupational health and safety. In Zimbabwe the National Social Security Authority is the governing body responsible for enforcing occupational safety and health regulations. It carries out surprise inspections and can fine or shut down companies that violate safety laws according to Mapuvire and Mutasa (2022). For example, after a fire incident at a clothing manufacturing company in Harare it investigated and discovered that the fire extinguishers were expired and emergency exits were locked. The company was fined and workers were retrained on fire safety. Such regulatory interventions help enforce accountability and promote a culture of safety within workplaces.

OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY HEALTH IN ZIMBABWE

Occupational safety and health in Zimbabwe remains a critical issue that requires sustained efforts to protect the lives and wellbeing of workers in various sectors of the economy. Government initiatives are aimed at improving occupational health and safety through training programs, awareness campaigns and enforcement of regulations. The establishment of the occupational safety and health authority serves as a pivotal step towards enhancing workplace safety standards across all industries as according to Nyandoro (2021). Furthermore, collaborations with international organizations such as the International Labor Organization can provide additional resources and expertise.

Limited resources and infrastructure in some sectors hinder the effective implementation of occupational safety and health programs. Small and medium sized enterprises often lack the knowledge and resources to implement comprehensive safety measures. Reports indicate that Zimbabwe’s mines have high accident rates due to exposure to hazardous materials. inadequate protective equipment and overcrowded working conditions. For instance, a report by the Zimbabwe Chamber of Mines highlighted that in 2019 alone, more than fifty workers lost their lives in mining-related incidents, underscoring the need for stricter safety measures and regular inspections. Hence the use of obsolete machinery combined with limited training in hazard reduction exacerbates the risks faced by workers contributing to an ongoing cycle of injuries and fatalities.

Regulatory frameworks by Zimbabwe has established laws and regulations governing occupational safety and health. This includes the factories workers act. Notably the Zimbabwean Labor Act (Chapter 28:01) establishes the legal framework for occupational safety and health mandating that employers ensure the wellbeing of their workers. However, enforcement can be inconsistent due to resource constraints.

RELEVANCE

Occupational safety and health is a crucial aspect of workplace management. This is as a result of saving lives and prevention of injuries through creation of safer work environments. As an example the mining sector in Zimbabwe often reports accidents related to inadequate safety measures leading to injuries and fatalities amongst workers as according to Muzenda (2019). Workplace accidents can cause serious harm, from minor cuts to bruises to permanent disabilities and even death. Thus occupational safety and health being relevant.

Occupational safety and health promotes positive workplace culture. Employees who feel that their employer cares about their safety and wellbeing are more motivated and engaged. This boosts employee morale, reduces turnover rates and creates collaborative and supportive working conditions. Therefore, occupational safety and health being of relevance.

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