

The impact of occupational health hazards on waste management workers' productivity in Nigeria

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Abstract

This study assessed the relationship between occupational health hazards and waste management workers productivity based on extant literature on the variables. The study discourse of literature covered the conceptualization, operational definitions and the possible relationship between the variables. The review also examined manifestations of occupational health hazards especially within the context of Nigeria and the possible impact of this on the well-being and productivity of waste management workers. The discourse further espoused on the current practices and relative measures undertaken by waste management organizations as well as the possible measures adopted in enhancing the state and nature of work conditions under which waste management workers are subjected. The review revealed substantial argument which links poor and inadequate management of health issues to workers poor productivity levels and health related events. Consequently, it was concluded that given the extent to which occupational health hazards impacts on workers productivity, it is therefore imperative that waste management organizations, especially those in Nigeria, adopt the necessary standardized health prerequisites and platforms duly recognized and affirmed by the relevant global health organizations such as the World Health Organization (WHO) with respect to workers work conditions and role expectations.

Keywords: Occupational health hazards, workers productivity, waste management.

Introduction

All waste management companies have a responsibility to safely and effectively manage waste as a normal part of their operation. Thus, due to several risky activities involved in oil and gas industries, industrial workers are expose to many accidents/injuries with heavy tools and equipment, inhaling of different chemical waste, fire and transportation accidents and adverse ergonomics conditions etc. Somers H.M. and Somers R.A (1984) traced the inception of the modern safety movement to around 1912 with the first cooperative congress and the organization of the National Safety Council. It was about this time that workmen's compensation laws were enacted which imposed financial responsibility upon the employer to compensate personnel's

injured on the job as well as to pay for their hospital bills. The purpose of the sensitization campaign by the National Safety Council was to educate the employers on the hidden and indirect costs of industry related accidents and diseases.

Consequently, the interest of the employer and employee coincide since the employee does not want to be injured and the employer does not want to be incurring the cost of the employee's injury. Occupational Health Hazard which is different from occupational safety hazard is prevalently on the rise as industrialization increases in the global world. However, it is crucial to identify most of these health hazards. Hence, this will aid in prevention and provision of some safety measures for the interest of the employers and the employees. Therefore, the

safety and health of the work force of the company which is seen as the valuable asset should never be compromised. While at work, workers face a lot of hazards such as chemicals, biological agents, physical health hazards, ergonomic hazard, psycho-social that affects their health and in many occasions leads to development of disease which at times results to death. There are risk factors that lead to injuries, accidents and death which are present in every work place. Today, in most industrialized countries, the occupational health and safety standard for workers are still either weak or non-existent in many organizations. OSH also commonly referred to as occupational safety and health is an area concerned with the safety, health and welfare of the people engaged in work or employment.

Occupational hazards can be divided into two categories: safety and health hazards. Safety hazards are those hazards that can cause accidents that physically injure workers; while health hazards are those ones that can result in the development of disease. It is vital to take into cognizance that a hazard only represents a potential to cause harm. Whether it actually does cause harm will depend on circumstances such as the toxicity of the health hazard, the extent of the exposure and duration. Hazards can also be rated according to how severe the harm they cause – a significant hazard being the one with potential to cause a serious injury, illness or death (Ontario Ministry of Labour, October 2013). Industrial accidents and the quest to provide harmonious industrial relations and ensure the safety of the populace in the postulations of Mensah and Julien, (2011) have made many countries to enact or update their safety and health laws. The inception of the modern safety movement in the narrative of Somers and Somers (1984) is traced around 1912 with first co-operative congress and the organization of the national safety council. It was about this time that state Workmen's compensation laws were enacted which imposed financial responsibility upon the

employer to compensate personnel injured on the job as well as to pay for the expenses for hospital bills

The neglect in the better working conditions of workers have put workers at greater risk and even exposures to work related hazards. Suffice it to say that majority of the industries in the developing nations, Nigeria inclusive lacks the basic environmental safety practices and regulations to keep workers at safety. Different types and methods of waste management, emits divers health risks substances. Some are in small quantities while others are in large quantity. The existence over time of waste disposal even transportation is very important for environmental reasons and even the well being of individuals at disposal sites. Consequently the interest of the employer and the employee coincide since the employer does not want to be incurring the cost of the employee injury. This notwithstanding, a healthy work force is vital for the success of any organization. A better approach to ensuring a perfect work related conditions is to ensuring a good work and health related regulations and policies, and this must adhere to and comply with health and safety standards.

The environment have been at the receiving end negatively as a result of mans quest for survival. These quests come in the nature of industrialization, urbanization and population increase. Work place conditions all over the world have generated intellectual discourse among scholars, health officers and even environmental health safety managers. In developing nations such as Nigeria work place conditions particularly in industries calls for greater concern. Price (2002) as noted in Oyesola & Odeku (2014) argued that well-publicized and evidenced-based impact of physical arrangement of the workplace in an organization business performance is very important to the stake holders and also the workers who perform different duties in the organization. Against the above backdrop, Freeman (2010) contend that in recent years,

the issues surrounding health and safety are becoming more prominent and new phrases, ideas and concepts are being introduced.

However, in a developing economy like Nigeria, context-based studies and reviews on workplace accidents and injuries are lacking. This stems from the fact that most of the studies mentioned above have rather focused on the identified coherent reasons for work place accident, with identifiable data on numbers of casualties within the context of developing economies and highly advanced organizational frameworks as compared to what is obtainable in Nigeria, hence the need for a study such as this which emphasizes on the manifestations and interplay of the study constructs (occupational health hazards and waste management workers productivity) within the context of Nigeria. This forms the basis for this study.

Aim and Objectives of the Study: The aim of the study is to examine the impact of occupational health hazards on waste management workers productivity.

Research Questions: What is the impact of occupational health hazard on waste management workers productivity?

Literature Review

Occupational Health and Safety (OHS): Occupational health as defined by the joint committee of the ILO/WHO (1950) is the promotion and maintenance of the highest degree of physical, mental and social well-being of workers in all occupation. It is further explained as the sum total of all activities and programs that are engaged upon aiming to attain and maintain the highest level of health and safety for all people who are engaged in any type of work whatever. It involves the protection of worker health from any hazard to which they may be exposed to in the work environment. Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) is a preventive and proactive approach

which involves risk assessment, hazard identification, hazard mitigation hazard elimination and treatment of work-related injuries.

However, there is a lot of hazards (Safety and health hazards) in which people are exposed to in their jobs, both in formal and informal industries. Exposure to these hazards occurs for fairly long hours on a daily basis as the majority of the active hours of the day is spent at work (at least 8 hours per day). These hazards include: chemical, biological, physical, mechanical, psychological and ergonomic hazards for any person affected, it could be either or a couple of the various forms of hazard.

Health and safety are inevitable in any organization or business. The reason is that the only time an employee will perform his duties is when the employee is in good health and he is sure of a safe working condition. Also, a good worker will perform his duties effectively only when he is sure that even when an accident occurs, he will be given a proper treatment and compensation. According to Goetzl (1991), improving employees health and safety practice at work, is directly related to their productivity and profitability of organizations. Also, Oxenburgh et al (2004) argued that “the health and safety of all employees is closely linked to the company’s productivity in all work places. Providing workers with a safe and healthy work environment, free from physical, chemical, biological and radiological hazards inherent in a particular industry sector, is essential for ensuring the long term sustainability of the organization and operations. A company is required to implement all reasonable precautions to prevent accidents, injury and illness of workers in the course of performing their duties. This includes following industry specific workers safety standards and implementing preventive and protective measures to.

The Development and State of Health and Safety in the Work Place in West Africa: The Nigerian Perspective: Occupational health practice as reviewed by Asuzu Mc. West J. Med-1996 Jan-March, was originated in Europe following the systematic work of Bernardino Ramazzini in Italy at the turn of the 17th century – it grew mostly under the notion of industrial health, concentrating on the chemical, mechanical and social conditions of labourers as well as the work of the arts and trade, until the work of Charles Turner Thackrah in Britain broadened its understanding to include the professions and certain civic ways of living. The health and safety in industries in Nigeria have however not been in anyway adequate from studies in that area, especially among the indigenous small and medium sized companies.

The international labour organization, in continuation of its efforts to improve health and safety at work, produced a model code of safety regulations for industrial establishments for the guidance of government and industries”. The manual was based on a draft prepared by experts and approved by a tripartite technical committee held in Geneva in the autumn of 1948, in accordance with a decision of the governing body of the International Labour Office. This code was put in its final form in 1949, and was placed at the disposal of governments and industries for guidance in framing or revising their own safety regulations. Nigeria, as a member of the international labour organization ratified and adopted the relevant international labour organization convention, and in 1955, enacted “an ordinance to make provision for the health, safety and welfare of persons employed in factories and other places. However, the ordinance came into force on 1st September, 1956. It became the chapter 66 of the laws of the federation of Nigeria and Lagos in force on the 1st June, 1958. When it was later reviewed 1987 with a commencement date of 11th June, 1987; it is currently the factories Act, 1990.

The Nigerian working environment over the years have become very challenging due to a number of verifiable facts such as lack of implementation of Labour laws, particularly on health and safety, sharp labour practices by multinational organizations, out dated legislations that have continued to negate international best safety practices. This is manifested in work place in the form of poor ventilations, lack of protective gears, excessive noise and poor lightening systems. Workers placed under these conditions mentioned above are prone to occupational health risk in the discharge of their duties.

The increase in the nature of industrial activities have continued to generate huge disposable and in disposable waste in industrialized and industrializing nations. One of the many problems facing these nations is the issues of proper waste management. This has become a major concern for scholars in the field of waste management and occupational safety. For instance Oyesola & Odeku (2014) points to the fact that organization of the workplace should also provide proactive ways of evacuating the workforce and preventing neighbours from being injured in cases of workplace accidents and hazardous disasters. ILO (2009) estimated that at least 250 million occupational accidents occurred every year worldwide, 33,500 Of the accidents are fatal resulting to death. In another study Ekram, Safaa, Sameh, Sana, Hanan, and Amira (2014) conclude that Workers exposed to chemical waste exhibit significant increase in risk of ill health. This is in relation to poor personal hygiene and self-care, inadequate protective and safety measures for potentially hazardous exposure. For Thayyil , Mathummal and Rao (2013) The prevalence of Respiratory, dermatological, eye problems and injury, musculoskeletal problems were reported to be high among industrial chemical waste managers.

Sadly, WHO (1998) noted that more than two million people die yearly from work related

accidents and disease. This followed ILO (2009) argument that the dearth of data and statistics makes it hard for researchers to estimate the actual number of people affected in work place injuries. Distinctively ILO (2009) believes that dearth rates in many developing countries arising from work place hazards are five to six times higher than cases in developed countries. Alarmingly Hamalainen, Takala and Saarela (2006) estimated that the annual rate of occupational accidents and non-fatal is kept at 270million.

The Effects of Occupational Hazards on Workers and Organization: Occupational hazards could easily affect any organization and cause adverse effects on the health of the workers. For instance, if a key or a large number of staff are affected, the organizational productivity will also be affected greatly. Some of the effects of occupational hazards are listed below:

- i. Impairing performance and productivity
- ii. Increasing complaints from clients and customers
- iii. Increasing workers absenteeism
- iv. Damaging the organization's image both among its workers and externally
- v. Decreasing commitment to work
- vi. Increasing liability to legal claims and actions by injured workers or workers family members.

Similarly, Adesanya (1997) added that, industrial hazard such as air pollutants which abound in various forms in many areas and cities especially the industrial centres have components in form of particular matters and gases. They affect not only the health of man,

but also other creatures and vegetation in the environment. They also have irritating effects upon the eyes and skin as well as upon the respiratory tracts. According to Herper (1999), health risk from industrial activities can occur through direct physical injury from accidents during industrial operation, acute chemical poisoning in the work place or surrounding and long-term exposure to chemicals released into the general environment. David (2005) added that dusts from industrial production constitute the pollution which are composed of toxic chemical concentrations that usually affect man, resulting to respiratory and skin diseases.

Udoh (1990) also added that radiation in high doses causes somatic and genetic defects in man. The somatic damage may appear as skin damage, eye contracts, liver damage, spleen and thyroid damage and reduced fertility. Exposure to environmental contamination also influences nutritional needs of the individual. Other effects associated with radiation include leukemia or uncontrolled growth of cancerous cells in the body. While the genetic damage appears in the offspring as mutations, they may become hereditary. Two Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki are typical examples. He further posited that noise especially above 80 – 85 can cause ear damage and temporary or even permanent hearing loss. Other levels of noise can cause decreased heart rate, vibration in blood pressure or breathing difficulties. Others include fatigue, emotional stress, hypertension, colitis and ulcer.

Conclusions

The aim of this study was to investigate the impact of occupational health hazards on the productivity of waste management workers in Nigeria. Broadly speaking, the arguments presented in the study offered varied forms of the manifestation of occupational health hazards and as such varied implications of such manifestations on the well-being and productivity of waste management workers. The discourse revealed that workers in Nigeria

are faced with various poor health and occupational standards which is further worsened by the loose and negligent attitudes of authorities and other supposedly regulatory agencies in charge. This has brought about outcomes of poor attitudes towards work, high instances of absenteeism, workers alienation, turnover and poor commitment towards work. However, it was emphasized that these outcomes can be reversed through the enactment and establishment of relevant integrative frameworks which should seek to harmonize workers well-being with their role expectations, with emphasis on their health. This can be achieved through strict adherence to global waste management standards and formats based on the recommendations of WHO and other relevant health oriented organizations.

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