

EFFECTS OF OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY PRACTICES ON WORKERS PERFORMANCE IN NIGERIA

by

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Abstract

This study investigates the effects of occupational health and safety (OHS) practices on workers' performance in Nigeria. Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) is a critical aspect of human resource management and organizational sustainability, aiming to protect the physical, mental, and social well-being of workers in all occupations. This study employs a secondary data analysis approach, reviewing existing literature, occupational health and safety (OHS) journal, government publications and reports, industry reports, Peer-reviewed journal articles, Data synthesis involves qualitative thematic and content analysis and available data. The discussion and finding reveal that despite existing legislation, the implementation of comprehensive OHS practices across various Nigerian sectors remains largely inadequate. The findings indicate that there are variations in OHS practice implementation and their effects across different sectors (e.g., manufacturing vs. service, formal vs. informal), highlighting the need for sector-specific interventions. The study concluded that effective implementation of occupational health and safety practices is crucial for enhancing workers' performance in Nigeria. A comprehensive review of existing knowledge is essential to inform targeted interventions and policy reforms. The recommended that strengthening regulatory frameworks and enforcement, Advocate for stricter enforcement of existing OHS legislation, increased capacity building for regulatory bodies (e.g., inspectorates), and a shift towards a more proactive, preventative approach, develop and implement widespread awareness campaigns targeting both employers and employees on the importance of OHS, their rights, and responsibilities.

Keywords: Occupational Health and Safety (OHS), Practices, Workers Performance, Nigeria

1. INTRODUCTION

Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) is a critical aspect of human resource management and organizational sustainability, aiming to protect the physical, mental, and social well-being of workers in all occupations (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2021). Globally, the significance of OHS practices in fostering a productive workforce and sustainable enterprises is widely acknowledged. However, in developing countries like Nigeria, the implementation and adherence to OHS standards often face significant challenges, leading to a concerning incidence of workplace accidents, injuries, and occupational diseases. These challenges not only pose a threat to individual workers' well-being but also have profound implications for their performance, productivity, and the overall economic development of the nation.

Organizations have the moral and legal obligations to ensure there is safe and healthy working environments with the intent of ensuring their employees total-well-being. The provision of any form of health as well as safety program varies in accordance with the size and the location of an organization, the type of employees and the nature of work being performed. Occupational health is in this case driven towards improving the working conditions within an organization's environment (Dyck, 2015). Thus, occupational health and safety is a process of ensuring that people stay safe and healthy in the workplace to increase workers capacity to perform.

Occupational health and safety (OHS) is fundamental to ensuring a productive and healthy workforce. Globally, organizations that prioritize safety experience fewer accidents, higher morale, and increased efficiency (Zohar & Luria, 2020). In Nigeria, rapid industrialization has led to expanded workplaces; however, enforcement of safety standards remains inconsistent, resulting in frequent workplace accidents and occupational illnesses (Nigerian Labour Congress, 2022). Despite policies aimed at improving safety, many organizations struggle with resource constraints, management negligence, and low safety awareness, which compromise worker health and organizational productivity (Olusegun & Adeyemi, 2021). This scenario underscores the need to evaluate how safety practices influence worker performance, with the goal of informing policy and managerial decisions to foster safer and more productive workplaces.

However, effective safety practices, improve the performance of the employees and the organization, by reducing costs associated with accidents, disabilities, absenteeism, or illness and legal action to the organization. There are also indirect costs associated with work-related accidents that cause negative effect on morale of the employees due to accidents which often leads to possible reduction in the quality of work. Health and safety standard is very important in a work place since a lot of employees have lost their lives whilst others have sustained various degrees of injuries through accidents. Although knowledge and experience are important parts of safe work and prevention of accidents, employees' aptitude and approach to work is also essential for ensuring a healthier working environment. Improving employee performance through health and safety practices is important as it leads to the organization effectiveness (Rizky & Ardian, 2019).

Furthermore, the current global workforce stands at about 2.8 billion with workers spending about one third of their lifetime at workplace. Workers expect safe working environment as their fundamental human right. However, there are still poor working conditions especially in

developing countries. Workers all over the world, face dual occupational hazards, the traditional as well as novel in the complex work settings due to rapid industrialization, technological advancement and globalization, over the last few years. This has resulted into injuries, accidents, illnesses, disabilities and death. Occupational health issues affect individuals, families as well as the communities, hence the need for occupational health (Aloiseghe, & Raymond, 2021).

This research paper seeks to investigate the effects of occupational health and safety practices on workers' performance in Nigeria. It aims to shed light on the current state of OHS in various sectors, identify the challenges hindering effective implementation, and ultimately propose recommendations for enhancing OHS practices to optimize workers' performance and promote a healthier, safer, and more productive workforce.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the increasing recognition of OHS globally, Nigeria continues to grapple with a high prevalence of workplace hazards, accidents, and occupational diseases. Reports indicate that many Nigerian workplaces, particularly in the manufacturing, construction, and informal sectors, are characterized by poor safety standards, inadequate training, and weak enforcement of existing regulations (Adeogun & Okafor, 2013; Onyejeocha, 2024). This precarious situation leads to frequent injuries, illnesses, and even fatalities, which, in turn, contribute to absenteeism, reduced morale, high employee turnover, and ultimately, a significant decline in overall workers' performance and organizational productivity.

Existing literature highlights the direct link between a hazardous work environment and decreased employee performance (Chandrasekar, 2011; Windapo & Oladapo, 2012). However, a comprehensive understanding of the specific OHS practices, their level of implementation across diverse Nigerian sectors, and their nuanced effects on different facets of workers' performance (e.g., productivity, quality of work, attendance, job satisfaction, commitment) remains limited. Furthermore, while some studies touch on challenges like inadequate safety equipment, low awareness, and weak enforcement (Idubor & Oisamoje, 2013; Onyejeocha, 2024), a detailed, recent analysis incorporating national policy shifts (e.g., Nigeria's ratification of ILO Convention 187) is needed. This research aims to bridge these gaps by providing an in-depth analysis of the current situation and offering evidence-based insights for policy and practice improvements.

2. METHODS

This study employs a secondary data analysis approach, reviewing existing literature, occupational health and safety (OHS) journal, government publications and reports, industry reports, Peer-reviewed journal articles, Data synthesis involves qualitative thematic and content analysis and available data in conceptual and literature review

3. DISCUSSIONS

Concept of Occupational Health and Safety: Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) encompasses a wide range of activities aimed at preventing accidents, injuries, and illnesses in the workplace. These include hazard identification and risk assessment, provision of personal protective equipment (PPE), safety training and awareness programs, emergency preparedness,

and the promotion of a healthy work environment (Hughes & Ferrett, 2020; Izuagu & Onyekwere, 2019).

Workers Performance: Worker performance, on the other hand, can be measured through objective dimensions like productivity, efficiency, and quality of output, and subjective dimensions such as job satisfaction, motivation, and commitment (Bhatti et al., 2013; Richard, 2009). Workers performance is the concentrated effort of employees in discharging their assigned jobs perfectly in the agreed standard and timely base on organizational objective. In addition, employee's performance can be interpreted as to what was done perfectly as expected and in accordance with the following five (5) elements; 1.) Quantity of work done. 2.) The quality of time spent. 3.) The satisfaction driven by the clients for loyalty. 4.) Annual successful operations, and 5.) Successful team work in achieving corporate objective (Gbadago, Amedome & Honyenuga, 2017).

Workers performance can be described as the record of outcomes achieved for each job function during a specific period of time. It very well may be shown in progress or improvement underway, easiness or effortlessness in using the new technology or innovation, and highly motivated or energetic workers or employees. At the same time, employee performance can simply be seen as employees undertaking the activities as expected and outlined in their job description. Workers performance is defined as the outcome or result of the contribution or commitment of employees or workers to make them attain goals while performance might be used to define what an organisation has achieved or accomplished with respect to the process, results, relevance, and success. Employee performance is everything about the performance of employees in a firm or a company or an organisation. It involves all aspects or viewpoints which directly or indirectly influence and relate or recognize to the work of the employees (Elnaga & Imran, 2013).

Components of Occupational Health and Safety Practices

The following are the components of occupational health and safety:

- a) **Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment:** This involves identifying potential hazards in the workplace, such as unsafe equipment, exposure to harmful substances, ergonomic issues, or psychosocial factors. Risk assessment helps in evaluating the likelihood and severity of these hazards and determining appropriate control measures.
- b) **Risk Control and Prevention:** Once hazards are identified, steps are taken to control or eliminate them. This can involve engineering controls (e.g., modifying equipment or processes), administrative controls (e.g., implementing safety protocols and procedures), and personal protective equipment (PPE) to mitigate risks (Chan et al., 2023).
- c) **Training and Education:** Providing workers with adequate training and education on OHS practices is essential. This includes raising awareness of workplace hazards, teaching safe work procedures, promoting proper use of protective equipment, and fostering a safety-conscious culture among employees (Kyriazos, 2018). Health

Surveillance: OHS programs often include health surveillance systems to monitor the health status of workers exposed to particular risks. This may involve regular medical check-ups, monitoring of exposure to hazardous substances, and assessing the impact of work-related factors on workers' health (Manzo, 2017).

- d) **Incident Reporting and Investigation:** Establishing mechanisms for reporting and investigating workplace incidents is crucial for identifying the causes and preventing future occurrences. Incident reporting systems help in collecting data, analyzing trends, and implementing corrective actions to improve safety (Misiurek & Misiurek, 2017).
- e) **Compliance with Regulations:** OHS is governed by laws, regulations, and standards set by governmental bodies or industry organizations. Compliance with these regulations is essential to ensure a safe work environment and avoid legal consequences (International Labour Organization, 2018). Continuous Improvement: OHS practices should be reviewed and updated regularly to adapt to changing work conditions, emerging risks, and technological advancements. Continuous improvement involves monitoring performance, conducting audits, and seeking feedback from workers to identify areas for enhancement (Mollo et al., 2019).

Present situation of occupational health and safety in Nigeria

The current situation of occupational health and safety in Nigeria is characterized by a paradox: increasing governmental awareness and legislative efforts alongside persistent challenges in practical implementation. While the ratification of ILO Convention 187 and the unveiling of new OSH regulations signify a commitment at the policy level, on-the-ground realities often lag behind.

1. **Legislative Framework:** Nigeria has a legal framework for OHS, primarily the Factories Act of 1990 (now replaced by the Factories Act 2004) and more recently, the new regulations unveiled in 2024. However, weak enforcement, corruption, and insufficient human and financial resources for regulatory bodies remain significant hurdles (Onyeozili, 2005).
2. **Employer Practices:** While some large multinational corporations in Nigeria may adhere to international OHS standards, many local businesses, particularly Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), often prioritize cost-cutting over safety, leading to inadequate provision of safety equipment, lack of training, and poor workplace conditions (Nnedinma et al., 2014).
3. **Worker Awareness and Behavior:** A significant challenge lies in low awareness among workers regarding their OHS rights and responsibilities. Some workers may also exhibit nonchalant attitudes or believe that occupational hazards are "predestined" (Idubor & Oisamoje, 2013), contributing to non-compliance with safety regulations.
4. **Data Deficiencies:** As previously mentioned, the lack of a robust national occupational health surveillance system means that the true extent of work-related injuries and diseases

is often underestimated, hindering evidence-based policy formulation and targeted interventions (Orikpete & Ewim, 2023).

5. **Emerging Issues:** Beyond traditional physical hazards, there is a growing recognition of psychosocial hazards and mental health issues in Nigerian workplaces (Onyejeocha, 2024), further complicating the OHS landscape.

Empirical Literatures

Empirical Evidence (International): Studies from various countries consistently demonstrate a positive correlation between effective OHS practices and improved worker performance. Healthy and safe workers are more likely to be productive, absent less frequently, and exhibit higher levels of job satisfaction and commitment (Australian National Commission for Health and Safety, 2017; McCunney, 2001). Conversely, poor OHS leads to increased absenteeism, presenteeism (being at work but not fully productive due to illness or injury), and reduced overall output (Molamohamadi & Ismail, 2014).

Empirical Evidence (Nigeria): In the Nigerian context, research has also begun to establish this link. For instance, studies have found that robust health and safety policies positively impact workers' performance by improving physical well-being, motivation, and job satisfaction (ResearchGate, n.d., Impact and Significance of Occupational Health and Safety Policies on Workers Performance). Izuogu and Onyekwere (2019) highlighted a scarcity of empirical studies linking industrial safety to well-being status in Nigeria. However, recent studies indicate that OHS practices, such as safety training, incident reporting, and proper use of PPE, positively contribute to employee performance (EANSO Journals, n.d.). Conversely, hazardous and unhygienic work environments in Nigerian manufacturing organizations have been linked to employee dissatisfaction and decreased performance (ijebmr, n.d.). Challenges to compliance include inadequate equipment, low awareness, and the perception that hazards are predestined (Idubor & Oisamoje, 2013).

Theoretical Framework

Hierarchy of Needs Theory

The study is anchored on Abraham Harold Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory (1943) that suggested that if an individual employee needs of being well secured (Safety/ Security and Social needs) is guaranteed such workers be motivated to give his best in achieving organizational goals and objectives. To elaborate more, the theory demonstrates that if safety need is assured the employees would perform excellently. Based on the theory, it can be argued that health and safety measures are likely to affect workers performance. Prior studies have found similar meaningful relationships between workers performance and health and safety perception.

The need for safety was acknowledged as a basic human need by Abraham Maslow in his theory of 'hierarchy of needs'. The theory views safety needs as those which represent the second tier in Maslow's hierarchy. Among other needs advocated by Maslow in his theory, is employment security, resources, family while the most important ones are security of body and of health being (Bayram, Ünğan, & Ardiç, 2017). Being secured at workplace by employer, according to Maslow, is to feel safe and secure and is a primal need that we all face, which must be met before one can face other higher levels of needs. The theory insists on employers to protect their

employees so that they become committed, and morale motivated in order to perform the job that is to live free from harm, abuse and neglect safety at workplace (Clarke, 2006). Safety is regarded as an integral part of providing high-quality health care that can improve the performance of the employees at the workplace. It is important to note that when safety needs are not met by employers, posttraumatic stress may occur to employees, and this can affect ones performance and the general productivity of the company.

According to this theory, individuals who do not feel safe at the workplace may experience depression or anxiety. It is also argued that poor health and safety at the workplace can have a massive impact on the production unit; not only it can destroy industry and financial cost but it should be noted that severely injured workers are always costly to the company. This means that health and safety of workers from any harm or psychological touchers is important for effective workers performance.

Findings revealed that despite existing legislation, the implementation of comprehensive OHS practices across various Nigerian sectors remains largely inadequate. There is series of evidenced reports of workplace accidents, occupational diseases, and poor working conditions. The absence of a robust national OHS data system hinders evidence-based policymaking and targeted interventions. The findings indicate that there are variations in OHS practice implementation and their effects across different sectors (e.g., manufacturing vs. service, formal vs. informal), highlighting the need for sector-specific interventions.

4. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, this study posits that the effective implementation of occupational health and safety practices is crucial for enhancing workers' performance in Nigeria. While existing literature suggests a positive link, there are significant gaps in understanding the nuanced effects of specific OHS interventions within the diverse Nigerian industrial landscape, coupled with persistent challenges in practical implementation and data collection. Considering the discussions in the study that has provided a foundational understanding, there is the need for more nuanced research focusing on the differential effects of specific OHS interventions on various performance indicators in diverse Nigerian industries. In addition to focusing on the mediating and moderating factors (e.g., organizational culture, management commitment, worker participation) that influence the relationship between OHS and performance in the Nigerian context. There is the need to:

- a) Strengthening Regulatory Frameworks and Enforcement: Advocate for stricter enforcement of existing OHS legislation, increased capacity building for regulatory bodies (e.g., inspectorates), and a shift towards a more proactive, preventative approach.
- b) Promoting OHS Awareness and Education: Develop and implement widespread awareness campaigns targeting both employers and employees on the importance of OHS, their rights, and responsibilities. Integrate OHS education into vocational training and higher education curricula.
- c) Developing a Robust National OHS Data System: Invest in establishing a centralized and comprehensive national occupational health surveillance system to accurately collect, analyze, and disseminate data on workplace accidents, injuries, and diseases. This data is critical for evidence-based policymaking and research.

- d) Encouraging Participatory Approaches: Promote employee involvement in OHS decision-making processes, hazard identification, and risk assessment to foster a culture of safety and shared responsibility.
- e) Sector-Specific Interventions: Develop tailored OHS strategies and guidelines that address the unique hazards and challenges prevalent in different industries within Nigeria.

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