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A Survey Study of Staff and Employees Awareness About Occupational Hazards and Safety Practice in Zagazig University

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ABSTRACT

Background: Universities include complex environments with a wide range of hazards, especially in research, that represent high risk on staff. However, little is known about university staff and employees' awareness of health hazards and their adherence to safety precautions in developing countries. This study aims to assess the levels of awareness of Zagazig University staff and employees towards occupational hazards and safety practice and study the relationship with their demographic and occupational data.

Methods: A cross-sectional study was carried on 282 staff and employees (121 teaching staff 112 employees and 49 hospital health care workers) at Zagazig University, using a structured questionnaire to collect data.

Results: Results indicated that the majority (86.7%) of the studied

group were aware of psychosocial hazards, followed by mechanical, chemical, biological, and physical (69.1%, 64.2%, 51.8%, and 42.2%) respectively. Only 55.7% of the studied group were aware of control measures.



Conclusions: High percentage of university staff and employees lack awareness about occupational hazards. They also lack awareness about occupational safety practice and control measures.

Keywords: university staff, occupational hazards, safety practice.

INTRODUCTION

Occupational Health is defined as the promotion and maintenance of the maximum degree of physical, mental, and social well-being of workers in all occupations by preventing departures from health, controlling risks, and the adapting of work to people, and people to their jobs [1].

Occupational hazards refer to workplace factors with a potential for harm in terms of injury or ill health. Hazards are classified into four categories: physical, chemical, biological, and psychosocial. Exposure to these hazards can cause occupational diseases and work accidents [2].

Universities are especially unique workplaces due to the potential exposure to a variety of agents representing both acute and chronic risks. Besides, principal investigators within these universities operate independently often with minimal administrative oversight making it difficult to build a strong safety culture [3]. Risks related to the academic environment are frequently perceived as being much lower than risks associated with large-scale process industry operations. While the records of hazardous materials are lower in the university environment and the number of hazards may be lower, factors such as materials of construction used in laboratories and the proximity of researchers to their equipment may link to high individual risk for laboratory workers [4].

Global changes to the academic work environment have been frequently linked to increases in job stress [5], job dissatisfaction [6], musculoskeletal disorders [7], and voice disorders at academic workplaces [8]. Research hazards as animal facilities and potentially infectious material in laboratories require professional occupational health input to the development of preventive policies and the delivery of preventive services [9].

Healthcare workers continue to face several hazards in their workplaces including musculoskeletal diseases [10], risk of infections as needle stick injuries [11], carcinogenic agents, latex allergies [12], violence, and stress [13].

Awareness about occupational health and safety plays an important role in the prevention of occupational injuries and diseases [14]. Awareness activities can be used to reinforce positive attitudes and fortify safe working behaviors [15].

This study aimed to promote the health of university staff and employees through assessing the level of awareness of Zagazig University staff and employees towards occupational hazards and safety practices and studying the relationship between their awareness and demographic and occupational data.

METHODS

This study was conducted as a cross-sectional study among teaching and hospital staff and administrative employees at Zagazig University, Sharkia Governorate, Egypt.

Exclusion Criteria are those working for less than 6 months.

Sample size & technique:

The sample size was calculated using Open Epi software 6.1 according to the following: total number of Zagzig university working force was 12965 and awareness of ergonomics hazards in a previous study was 25% [16] so at CI 95%, the sample size was calculated to be 282 participants. A multistage sampling method was used, where Zagazig University was divided into 22 faculties. Then one practical faculty (Faculty of Pharmacy) and one theoretical faculty (Faculty of Arts) was selected by simple random sampling technique then at each selected faculty, teaching staff and employees were selected by simple random sampling technique with a proportional allocation as follow 121 teaching staff (43%), 112 employees (40%) [the half of teaching staff and employee were from theoretical faculties and the half from practical faculties] and 49 hospital health care workers (17%) [nurses, technicians, and auxiliary workers].

Data collection and analysis:

The study was conducted between October 2019 and October 2020. A quasi-structured questionnaire was used for data collection [17, 18]. A pilot study was conducted on 10% of the study sample to test the feasibility of the proposed main study, to identify potential problems with the proposed design, to help development or refinement of the data collection tools, and to give the investigator

experience with the proposed participants, the setting, and the procedure. Also, it helped in testing face validity and reliability of the proposed questionnaire. The study tool included sociodemographic (score was calculated using a scale provided by (Fahmy et al., [19]) and occupational data and awareness about occupational hazards, safety practices, and control measures. It included 38 questions answered by yes "score = 2" and no "score = 1" [awareness about occupational hazards (21 questions, maximum score 42), awareness about safety practices (16 questions, maximum score 32), and awareness about control measures (one question, maximum score 2). So, the total awareness score was 76. The median of the studied group's total awareness score was estimated to be 56 and subjects who had more than the median score were considered to have adequate awareness. Ethical approval:

The study protocol was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the Zagazig University, Faculty of Medicine (#5407/14-5-2019). The investigator explained the aim of the study to all participants. The participants were given the right to refuse or participate in the study. Informed written consent was obtained from all participants before filling the questionnaire. All participants were reassured about the confidentiality of any obtained information and that the study results will be used only for the purpose of research.

statistical analysis:

The collected data were computerized and statistically analyzed using the SPSS program (Statistical Package for Social Science) version 25.0 (IBM, 2017) [20]. Qualitative data were presented as frequencies and relative percentages. Quantitative data were expressed as mean $(\bar{x}) \pm$ SD (Standard deviation). Chi-square test (χ 2) was used to test the difference between qualitative variables. Quantitative data were compared using ANOVA test. The results were considered significant when P value was <0.05.

RESULTS

Table (1) revealed demographic and occupational data of the studied groups. The age of the studied group ranged from 23 to 65 years with a mean of 44.86 years \pm 12.22. About two-third of the studied sample were females (62.8%) and were of medium socioeconomic level (63.1%). Also, nearly half of them (57.8%) were from urban residences, while the majority of them (79.4%) were married. About 42.9% were teaching staff and 38.8% were

administrative employees. A high percentage of teaching staff (74.4%) had a doctoral degree, while nearly half (59.6) of the employees had school/institute education. Most of the studied group worked ≤ 8 hours (87.9%) and were working in day shift (74.5%). Finally, the work duration of the studied group ranged from 1 to 42 years with a mean of 21.04 \pm 12.47 years.

In figure 1, the majority of the studied group (86.7%) were aware of psychosocial hazards, followed by mechanical, chemical, biological, and physical hazards (69.1%, 64.2%, 51.8%, and 42.2% respectively).

Figure (1) showed that for psychosocial hazards, the most common one the studied group was aware of was work-related stress (94.3%) and for mechanical hazard was poor posture (81%). A high percentage of the studied group were aware of bacteria and viruses as biological hazards (73%), chemical liquids (70.2%) then radiation (64.5%), while a lower percentage of them were aware of biological allergens (52.1%), noise (48.2%) then flammable materials (44.3%).

Table (2) revealed that the highest level of awareness about display screen equipment as mechanical hazards was (63.8%), for biological hazards was towards bacteria and viruses (51.4%), for chemical hazards of chemical liquids (42.9%), for physical hazards as radiation was (30.1%) and for psychosocial hazards was towards work-related stress (9.2%).

Also, (55.7%) were aware of control measures. Nearly all of the participants who aware of control measures (97.4%) were aware of staff training, preemployment examination (94.9%), regulation of work hours (92.2%), provision of PPE (92.2%), and hand washing (86.9%), and the majority of them

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were aware of proper building design (81.7%), periodic medical examination (73.9%) and proper ventilation (73.9%). A lower percentage of them were aware of biological monitoring (47.7%) and isolation of hazards and availability of control policies (43.8%), as displayed in table 3.

Table (4) showed that the mean score of awareness about occupational hazards was 36.23 ± 5.7 and the mean total awareness score was $58.83 (\pm 9.82)$ and that about half of the studied group (51.07%) had inadequate awareness about occupational hazards.

Table (5) revealed that there was a statistical significance difference among practical and hospital staff of Zagazig university hospitals and employees compared to theoretical staff and employees regarding the mean of awareness of occupational hazards, safety practice, control measures, and total awareness score and also regarding the frequency of adequate awareness.

Table (6) showed that there was a statistical significance association between age and awareness as with older age the inadequate awareness is more frequent. Also, there was statistical significance association between (sex, marital status, socioeconomic level) and awareness where females, married and low socioeconomic level participants had inadequate awareness.

Also, those who spent a longer duration in work had inadequate awareness (p < 0.05). Type and site of occupation, level of education& work shift are factors affecting awareness level (p < 0.05), as administrative employees and teaching staff of theoretical faculties, employees with school/institute education, and those who worked at rotating shift had inadequate awareness.

employees					
Sociodemographic and occupational characteristics (n=282)					
Age:	$Mean(years) \pm SD$	$(s) \pm SD$ 44.86 ± 12.22			
-	Range	23 - 65			
		No	%		
Sex:	Male	105	37.2		
	Female	177	62.8		
Residence:	rural	119	42.2		
	urban	163	57.8		
Marital status:	Married	224	79.4		
	Unmarried	58	20.6		
Socioeconomic level	Low	23	8.2		
	Medium	178	63.1		

Table 1: Sociodemographic and occupational characteristics of the studied group of Zagazig university staff and employees

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Sociodemographic and occupati	Sociodemographic and occupational characteristics			
	High	81	28.7	
Occupation:	Theoretical teaching staff	61	21.6	
	Practical teaching staff	60	21.3	
	Administrative employees	112	38.8	
	Hospital staff	49	17.4	
level of education:	For teaching staff (n=121)			
	University degree	11	9.1	
	Master degree	20	16.5	
	Doctoral degree	90	74.4	
	For employees and hospital staff (n=161)			
	School/institute education	96	59.6	
	University degree	47	29.2	
	Postgraduate studies	18	11.2	
Duration of work: (year)	$ar{x} \pm SD$	21.04 ± 12	2.47	
	Range	1 - 42		
Working hours:	$\leq 8 h$	248	87.9	
-	> 8 h	34	12.1	
Work shift:	Day shift	210	74.5	
	Rotating shift	72	25.5	

Sd: Standared deviation

Table 2: Frequency distribution of the studied group in Zagazig University regarding awareness of safety practices towards different occupational hazards

Awareness of safety practices to	owards occupational hazards	(<i>n</i> =282)	
		No	%
	Radiation	85	30.1
Physical	Noise	38	13.5
	Electricity/ fire	64	22.7
	Chemical liquids	121	42.9
Chemical	Vapors and fumes	97	34.4
	Flammable materials	68	24.1
	Bacteria and viruses	145	51.4
Biological	Fungi	125	44.3
	Biological allergens	78	27.7
	Display screen equipment	180	63.8
	Poor posture	130	46.1
Mechanical	Musculoskeletal disorders	114	40.4
	Slippery floor	83	29.4
	Voice disorders	52	18.4
Psychosocial	Work related stress	26	9.2
	Violence	16	5.7

Table 3: Frequency distribution of the studied group in Zagazig University regarding awareness of medical and engineering control measures

Awareness of control measures		(<i>n</i> =282)		
		No	%	
Awareness of control	No	125	44.3	
measures	Yes	157	55.7	
		(n=157)		
Medical measures	Pre-employment examination	149	94.9	
	Periodic medical examination	113	73.9	
	Biological monitoring	73	47.7	
	Proper building design	125	81.7	
Engineering measures	Proper ventilation	113	73.9	
	Isolation of hazards	67	43.8	
	Regulation of work hours	141	92.2	
Administrative measures	Adequate staffing	127	83.0	
	Reporting to appropriate authorities	91	59.5	
	Availability of control policies	67	43.8	
Personal measures	Staff training	149	97.4	
	Provision of PPE	141	92.2	
	Hand washing	133	86.9	
	Correct body posture	111	72.5	

Table 4: The score of awareness regarding occupational hazards, safety practices and control measures among the studied group of Zagazig university staff & employees

Awareness score		(<i>n</i> =282)
Occupational hazards awareness	$\bar{\mathbf{X}} \pm \mathbf{SD}$	36.23 ± 5.7
-	Range	21 - 42
Safety practice awareness	$\bar{\mathbf{X}} \pm \mathbf{SD}$	21.04 ± 4.32
	Range	16-31
Control measures awareness	$\bar{\mathbf{X}} \pm \mathbf{S}\mathbf{D}$	1.55 ± 0.49
	Range	1-2
Total Awareness score	$\bar{\mathbf{X}} \pm \mathbf{SD}$	58.83 ± 9.82
	Range	39 – 75
	Inadequate awareness N (%)	144 (51.07%)
	Adequate awareness N(%)	138 (48.93%)
$\overline{\mathbf{v}}$ M \mathbf{c} $$		

X: MeanSd: Standard deviation

Table (5): Comparison between	theoretical staff	and employees,	practical staff	f and employees	and hospital staff
regarding total awareness scores					

Awareness score		Theoret $(n=117)$	ical	Practica (n=116)	l	Hospital (n=49)		F	Р		
Occupational hazards awareness	X ± SD Range	32.07±4. 22-42	.56 ^a	39.56±4. 29-42	87 ^b	38.3±3.1 34-42	3 ^b	87.21	<0.001**		
Safety practice awareness	$\bar{X} \pm SD$ Range	17.41±1. 16-21	.4 ^a	24.13±4. 17-31	14 ^b	22.38±2. 18-25	.55 ^b	152.14	<0.001**		
Control measures awareness	$\bar{X} \pm SD$ Range	1.38±0.4 1 - 2	9 ^a	1.65±0.4 1 - 2	·8 ^b	1.76±0.4 1 - 2	3 ^b	13.96	<0.001**		
Total Awareness score	$\bar{X} \pm SD$ Range	50.87±5.47 ^a 39-64		63.34±8.85 ^b 49-75		63.34±8.85 ^b 49-75		62.44±5. 54-70	.83 ^b	128.14	<0.001**
Total awareness score		No	%	No	%	No	%	χ^2	Р		

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Awareness score		Theoretical (n=117)Practical (n=116)		Hospital (n=49)		F	Р		
Total awareness	Adequate (n=138)	15	12.8	90	77.6	33	67.3	105.82	<0.001**
	Inadequate (n=144)	102	87.2	26	22.4	16	32.7		

F: ANOVA test χ^2 : Chi square test

NS: non significant (P>0.05) *: Significant (P<0.05) **: highly significant (P<0.001) Groups with different letters are statistically significant.

Table 6: Association between awareness level and sociodemographic & occupational data of the studied group of Zagazig university staff and employees

Variable		Total	Inadequate		Adequate			
			(n=144)		(n=138)		χ^2	P
			No	%	No	%		
Age:	\leq 45 years	132	32	24.2	100	75.8	71.44	<0.001
-	> 45 years	150	112	74.7	38	25.3		**
Duration of	\leq 20 years	130	30	23.1	100	76.9	75.6	<0.001
work:	> 20 years	152	114	75	38	25		**
Sex:	Male	105	36	34.3	69	65.7	18.84	<0.001**
	Female	177	108	61	69	39		
Residence:	Rural	119	64	53.8	55	46.2	0.60	0.43
	Urban	163	80	49.1	83	50.9		NS
Marital	Married	224	126	56.2	98	43.8	11.72	0.001*
status:	Unmarried	58	18	31	40	69		
Socioecono	Low	23	19	82.6	4	17.4		
mic level	Medium	178	102	57.3	76	42.7	28.59	<0.001**
	High	81	23	28.4	58	71.6		
Occupation	Teaching staff	61	46	75.4	15	24.6		
:	theoretical	60	1	1.7	59	98.3	105.71	<0.001**
	Teaching staff	112	82	73.2	30	26.8		
	practical	49	16	32.7	33	67.3		
	Administrative							
	employees							
	Hospital staff							
For	University	11	4	36.4	7	63.6		
teaching	degree	20	4	20	16	80	3.44	0.17
staff, level	Master degree	90	38	42.2	52	57.8		NS
of	Doctorate							
education:	degree							
For	School/institut	96	90	93.8	6	6.2		
employee	e education	47	8	17	39	83	109.51	<0.001**
&hospital	Graduate	18	0	0	18	100		
staff, level	Postgraduate							
of								
education:								
Working	less than or	248	128	51.6	120	48.4	0.24	0.61
hours:	equal 8 h	34	16	47.1	18	52.9		NS
	More than 8 h							
Work shift:	Day shift	210	98	46.7	112	53.3	6.36	0.012*
	Rotating shift	72	46	63.9	26	36.1		
······································	no toot NC.		$f_{a} = (D > 0)$	05)	*. Ciamifian	(D <0.05	\ **. L	· 1.1

 χ 2: Chi square test NS: non significant (P>0.05) *: Significant (P<0.05) **: highly significant (P<0.001)

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Figure (1): Frequency distribution of the studied group in Zagazig University regarding awareness of different types of occupational hazards.

DISCUSSION

Universities and colleges are likely to have a wide range of occupational health issues to manage because of the nature and diversity of their activities and staff. Universities frequently work in new fields where there is little information about risk [9].

Basic awareness about health and injury risks at the workplace can be regarded as one of the prerequisites to avoid specific dangers and to adopt generalized safety behavior. Safety awareness is associated with psychological correlates of safety climate, safety behavior, and outcomes like injuries or chronic disease [21].

Results showed that the age of the studied group ranged from 23 to 65 years with mean of 44 years in consonance with previous study findings in which the mean was 45.3 [22]. Regarding sex, most respondents were female similar to previous studies [7] and [23] where the female percentage was 66% and 81.7% respectively. From the present study, 63.1% participants were of medium of socioeconomic class and 28.7 were of high socioeconomic class similar to a study that revealed 50.1% of them were of medium socioeconomic class and 24.9 were of a high socioeconomic class [24].

Our results revealed that 42.9% were teaching staff and 74.4% of them had doctorate degree while in the study of Mohan et al. [7], 14% only had doctorate degree, also we found that 39.7% were employees and the majority of them were on a higher secondary degree in contrast to another study in which most of them (79.6%) were on Bachelor degree [23].

In the present study, the majority of the studied group (86.7%) were aware of psychosocial hazards, while (42.2%) were aware of physical hazards. In another study among health care workers [18], the majority of the participants (82%) recognized physical hazards. This difference may be attributed to that the majority of the study participants were of medium and high socioeconomic level, so their awareness of psychosocial hazards is high.

Regarding different occupational hazards, the recorded awareness of radiation, chemical liquids and, bacteria, and viruses was (64.5%, 70.2% and, 73%, respectively). In contrast, the results of another study that conducted on physicians showed that only 40% were aware of radiation hazard [25].

For mechanical hazards, 82% of participants were aware of poor posture. Nearly results were recorded, about (80%) poor posture, in another study [26]. This similarity may be due to the importance and impact of poor posture as a common hazard frequently seen among teaching staff and employees.

About 5.7% of the studied group were not aware of work-related stress. These results agree with previous study findings in which nearly all university staff reported high levels of stress [27]. The high level of stress may be due to high job demands, students' misbehavior, poor working conditions, and poor relationships at work. From the present study, 30% of the studied group were aware of safety practice towards radiation. This is in agreement with the results of another study [25].

From the results of this study, it was observed that only 9.2% were aware of safety practice towards work-related stress. In contrast, a study conducted on university employees illustrated that about onequarter of the respondents indicated that they were having difficulty dealing with work-related stress [28]. The deficient awareness level of safety practice among the studied group may be due to a staff training by the lack of university administration or due to limited understanding of staff safe behavior in the university setting.

The current study results showed that 55.7% of the studied group were aware of control measures. A similar study carried on healthcare workers that showed 64.6% of them knew control measures that are used to reduce hazards at the workplace [15]. This explains the high need for providing them with education and training services to improve their awareness about control measures to promote their health. Also, 73.9% were aware of periodic medical examination in our study, while only about half of the participants (50%) knew the correct periodic medical examination in a previous study [29].

The results demonstrated that a high percentage of participants who aware of control measures (92.2%) were aware of the provision of PPE and 86.9% were aware of hand washing. In another study, most respondents were most aware of PPE (72%) which is consistent with our results [15]. On the other hand, only 37.0% of participants knew that safety precautions include handwashing [30] and 56.7% in a previous study that carried on health care workers [31]. This may be attributed to the difference in perception about the risks they are exposed to and their susceptibility to these risks.

The study showed that 138 respondents (48.93 %) had adequate occupational hazards and safety awareness while 144 (51.07 %) respondents had inadequate awareness of occupational hazards and safety in the workplace. This is consistent with a previous study where results showed that 34.2% of the respondents had adequate awareness [15]. In contrast, another study reported that 57.6 % of respondents had adequate awareness [18]. The low level of awareness indicates the need for performing training workshops and sessions on occupational hazards, safety precautions, and the severity of occupational infections and diseases that could be fatal and life-threatening for them.

Limitations of this study include that the study was cross-sectional in design and could not establish a causal relationship among study variables and the study findings are also prone to respondents' bias arising from the use of a structured questionnaire.

CONCLUSION

It can be concluded from the results of the present study that a high percentage of university staff and employees lack awareness about occupational hazards, they were aware mostly of psychosocial hazards (86.7%). They also lack awareness about occupational safety practice and control measures.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Periodic training/seminars and intervention programs on occupational hazards and safety practice principles for all the university staff and employees. Carry out the study in other universities with different cultural backgrounds and demographical aspects and on a large geographical scale with a larger sample size to emphasize our conclusion.

Conflicts of interest: None.

Financial disclosure: None.

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