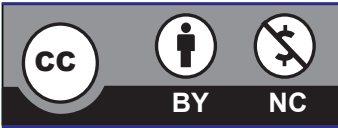


Research

An Assessment of Occupational Safety and Health Practices in Nepalese Garment Workers

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ABSTRACT

The article aims to assess the occupational safety and health (OSH) practices in Nepalese garment industries, particularly for home-based garment workers. The study uses a qualitative and descriptive methodology, including secondary information sourced from books, papers, published articles, and online platforms.

The findings show a lack of scientific studies on OSH in the Nepalese garment sector and an unsatisfactory overall status of OSH in Nepal. The study finds poor occupational safety and health practices in the garment business, with insufficient safety precautions and workers who are unaware of hazards and preventive measures. Workers in this industry have a variety of health problems, including musculoskeletal illnesses, which are more common in the sewing department. Musculoskeletal problems are connected with factors such as age, gender, and educational status. The study emphasizes the importance of quick and comprehensive measures by the government, businesses, and employees to improve occupational safety and health in this industry. The article also emphasizes the complicated nature of garment manufacturing units.

Keywords: OSH, safety, garment, musculoskeletal illnesses, health problem

Introduction

Occupational safety and health (OSH) is crucial for ensuring workplace efficiency and productivity. Workers in the garment industry face unique dangers on the job, including unsafe and unhealthy working conditions, sexual harassment, low pay, and physical pain from repetitive work (Kabir, H., et al., 2019). Health problems are the most significant risk that workers in the ready-made and home-based garment (RMG) industry face, particularly musculoskeletal illnesses, which are more common in the sewing department (Kabir, H., et al., 2019). Nepal's garment industry is a significant source of foreign currency, but accidents and diseases at work kill about 2 million people worldwide every year, with an estimated 2,000 workers in Nepal hurt or killed on the job annually (Shakya, S., 2018). Despite the alarming health issues in the garment industry, Nepal has not been able to solve these problems yet. (Mishra et al., 2019) has written extensively on safety-related issues, highlighting the burden of safety issues on developing-country labor and the need for safety equipment. The industrial sector is often the one that requires the most attention in the safety area (Kabir, H., et al., 2019). The World Health Organization (WHO) defines occupational health as "all aspects of health and safety in the workplace," with a strong emphasis on risk prevention of hazards (Maharjan PL, Shakya A, Shah S, et al., 2020).

Problem Statement

The garment industry is a significant source of foreign currency for Nepal, but occupational hazards and injuries are a major problem at the national and international levels. Workers in the garment industry face unique dangers on the job, including unsafe and unhealthy working conditions, sexual harassment, low pay, and physical pain from repetitive work. Health problems are the most significant risk that workers in the ready-made and home-based garment (RMG) industry face, particularly musculoskeletal illnesses, which are more common in the sewing department. Despite the alarming health issues in the garment industry (Gupta, 2015), Nepal has not

been able to solve these problems yet. There is a lack of scientific studies on OSH in the Nepalese garment sector, and an unsatisfactory overall status of OSH in Nepal (Bhattarai, P., Khadka, S., Khatri, A., 2021). Poor occupational safety and health practices in any business, with insufficient safety precautions and workers who are unaware of hazards and preventive measures, are also major issues (Bhattarai, P., Khadka, S., Khatri, A., 2021). Garment of Nepal draws the attention for research at the moment.

Research Objective

The objective of this research is to assess the occupational safety and health (OSH) practices in Nepalese garment industries.

Literature Review

Status of OSH in Nepal

Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) is still not fully understood in Nepal, and its value in small and medium-sized industries still needs to be shown (Rantanen, 2005). The severity of the problem is highlighted by the fact that more than 80% of the world's workforce lacks adequate access to OSH after more than three decades of complex needs assessment and prioritization (Rantanen, 2005). According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), over 250 million workers are injured on the job each year, with another 160 million suffering from occupational diseases. About 1.2 million workers die annually from occupational diseases and accidents (Gautam, R. and Prasain, J.N., 2011).

The agriculture sector has the highest share of employment in Nepal, followed by the service and industrial sectors (International Labour Organization). Work-related diseases and injuries were responsible for the deaths of 1.9 million people in 2016, according to the first joint estimates from the World Health Organization (WHO) and International Labour Organization (ILO). Since 1994, trade union federations, particularly the General Federation of Nepalese Trade Unions (GEFONT), have started an awareness campaign on OSH, taking the issue seriously (The World Bank, 2021).

The government is working on the problem through the OSH Project, which is run by the Ministry of Labour and Transportation Management, and the opening of an OSH Center, which was made possible with the help of the ILO and Danida in terms of money and expertise (National Occupational Safety and Health Profile for Nepal, 2022). The project aims to provide training, review legal frameworks, and help make first-hand knowledge about health conditions at work. The absence of measures to protect employees from potential risks poses a danger to their safety. In the industrial sector, there have been numerous instances in which a significant number of workers were injured due to insufficient safety measures. In some instances, victims are given money to cover their medical expenses, while in others they are not. Workers in certain industries get diseases that affect their physical and mental health, and reproductive health (The Himalayan Times, 2021; BMC Public Health, 2019; MOJ Public Health, 2020; Centre for Social Change, 2021).

Theory of Occupational Health and Safety

Part of job safety is how people, materials, tools, and machines interact with each other, with the surroundings, and with economic factors like productivity. Work should be good and not harmful, but it shouldn't be too hard either. From an economic point of view, the highest amount of productivity possible should be reached. Safety on the job should start with planning and last through all steps of production. So, job safety requirements are stated before work starts and followed throughout the work cycle. This is done so that the results can be evaluated, among other things, for feedback. During planning, it is also important to think about the supervisor's duty for the health and safety of everyone involved in the manufacturing process (BMC Public Health, 2019).

A job safety analysis (JSA) is a process to identify the dangers of specific tasks within jobs to reduce the risk of injury to workers. The process of creating a job safety analysis report is generally broken down into four steps, which makes it easier to ensure you complete every portion of the requirements

a JSA offers. The first step is to choose a job to analyze and break it down into each and every step. The second step is to identify potential hazards associated with each step. The third step is to determine preventive measures to overcome these hazards. The final step is to identify controls you can be taken to prevent these hazards from causing potential accidents. If you can't be eliminated the hazard, find ways to change the job procedure or limit the risk as much as possible (Mishra, A.K., & Aithal, P. S., 2021; The World Bank., 2021; ILO).

In Nepal, occupational safety and health (OSH) is still not fully understood, and its value in small and medium-sized industries still needs to be shown. Even though there have been many attempts, there is still a lot to do to set up complete OSH systems in the workplace. The severity of the problem is highlighted by the fact that more than 80% of the world's workforce lacks adequate access to OSH after more than three decades of complex needs assessment and prioritization. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), over 250 million workers are injured on the job each year, with another 160 million suffering from occupational diseases. About 1.2 million workers die annually from occupational diseases and accidents (Maharjan PL, Shakya A, Shah S, et al., 2020).

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The government is working on the problem through the OSH Project, which is run by the Ministry of Labour and Transportation Management, and the opening of an OSH Center, which was made

possible with the help of the ILO and Danida in terms of money and expertise. The main goal of the project is to provide training, review legal frameworks, and help make first-hand knowledge about health conditions at work (BMC Public Health., 2019: National Occupational Safety and Health Profile for Nepal, 2022). However, the absence of measures to protect employees from potential risks poses a danger to their safety. In the industrial sector, there have been numerous instances in which a significant number of workers were injured due to insufficient safety measures. In

some instances, victims are given money to cover their medical expenses, while in others they are not (BMC Public Health., 2019).

In general, people who work in certain industries get diseases that affect their physical and mental health, and reproductive health. So, the causes of occupational health and safety may come from different directions can be illustrate as basic causes shown in the figure 1 (Mishra, A.K., et al., 2022).

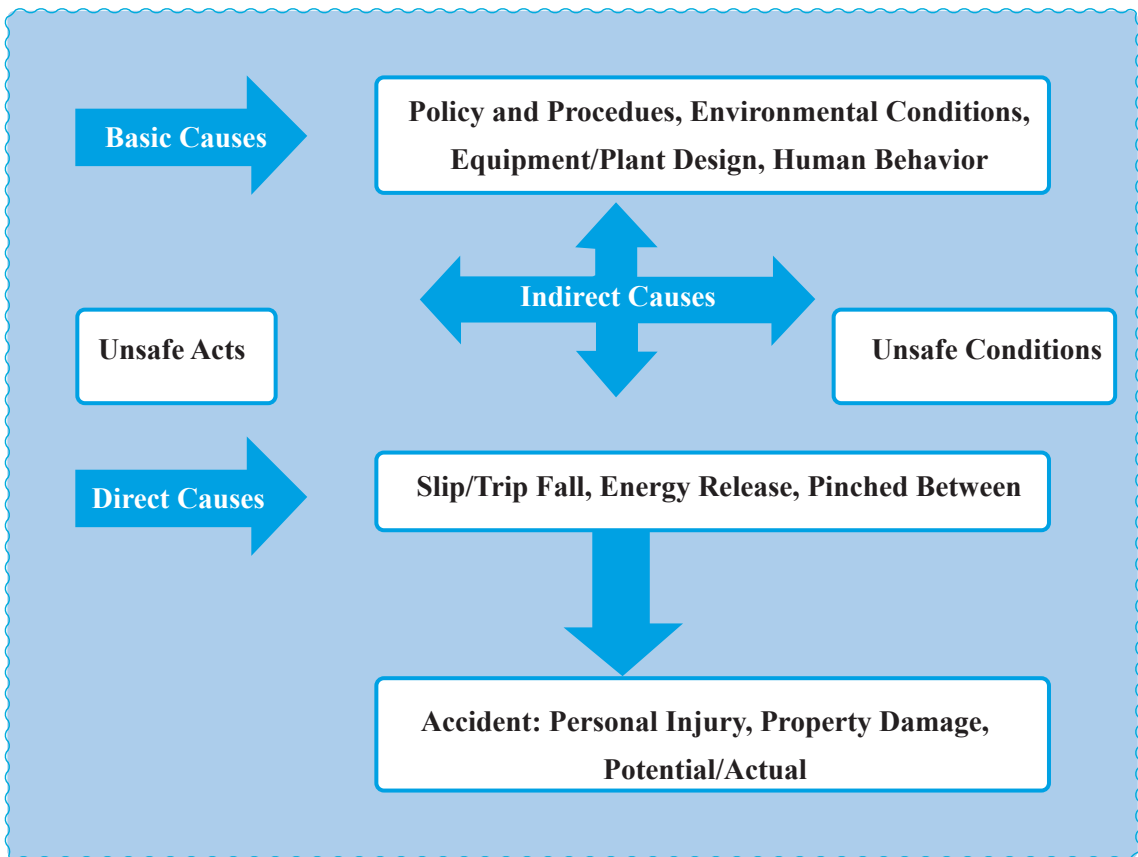


Fig.1: Basic Causes of Accidents

Legal provisions

Even though Nepal's 2015 Constitution does not have specific rules about health and safety at work, it does provide a framework for achieving, ensuring, and setting up the best health and safety

practices. The Labor Act of 2017 includes a section on occupational safety and health, which is the most important piece of national law to date that addresses worker safety and health. Other national laws, rules, and guidelines related to safety and

health also affect OSH issues. The Occupational Safety and Health Guidelines, which comply with the Constitution of Nepal 2072, provide additional guidance on OSH in the workplace. The safety of the workplace is an essential component of efficiency and productivity. Studies have identified the status and factors associated with occupational safety and health vulnerability among brick factory workers in Dhading District, Nepal, and measured the adequacy of workplace resources designed to mitigate the effects of hazard exposure. A review of previously published articles on occupational safety and health in Nepal has also been conducted. The General Federation of Nepalese Trade Unions (GEFONT) has conducted a study on occupational health hazards to gain a better understanding of workplaces and the environment in Nepal (Bhattarai, S., 2018).

Provisions of Labour Act

The Nepal Labour Act has rules for the safety and health of Nepalese workers on the job. The current Labour Act replaces one that was passed almost 30 years ago. It plans to completely change Nepal's job system by adding a number of new parts to replace old, out-of-date ones. From Clause 68 to Clause 83 of Section 12 of the Labour Act, which is about safety and health at work, we can see this. In reality, the Labour Act has made headcounts of workers unnecessary. As of right now, the current Act still applies to all workplaces, no matter how many workers are there. The old Act only applied to workplaces with ten or more workers, but the new Act has more inclusive rules and covers more workplaces (Labour Act, 2017). <https://lawcommission.gov.np/en/>

Insurance measures have also been added to the newer Labor Act. As part of the cost of medical care, the current Labor Act requires that at least NPR 100,000 per year be covered. In the same way, the Act says that each worker's care costs for work-related injuries must be covered for at least NPR 700,000. The Act says that the employee will pay half of the medical insurance premium and the employer will pay the other half. For accident insurance, however, the Act says that the employer

must pay the full premium. Other OSH-related parts of the Act include a requirement that a safety and health strategy be made for each workplace. These kinds of rules have to be registered with the right labor offices. The Labor Act also says that any place of work with 20 or more workers must have a safety group. The Act also has rules about how different committees linked to occupational safety and health (OSH) can be made. The Labour Act has made sure that companies are responsible and answerable for what they owe to their workers. The workers tell their bosses to make sure they are safe and healthy by making sure that using, operating, storing, or transporting chemical, physical, or biological materials doesn't hurt them in any way. It also makes employers responsible for giving workers the warnings, information, and training they need for safety and health.

The Act under review explains what employees and workers have to do and what their rights are, based on the Labor Act of Nepal from 2017. It talks about how important it is to make sure everyone is safe and healthy at work and asks people to avoid doing things that could hurt themselves or others. The Act also says that employees have to work with their bosses to set up health and safety plans and use the safety tools that their employers give them. Workers should be able to stop working if there is an instant threat to their safety, health, or equipment. This is a good rule that gives workers the power to put their own needs first.

The Act also says that workers with diseases that can be spread can't work until their treatment is done. This is done to stop the spread of diseases in the workplace. The paragraph says that employers are responsible for the costs of investigating and treating diseases that are caused by work. This includes compensation for workers if the disease can't be cured. But the paragraph isn't clear about some things, like whether or not companies have to give workers safety gear and how to figure out how much they should get paid. For a full understanding of the Labor Act, it's important to look at its exact wording, definitions, how it works in different situations, and how it's enforced.

OSH Standard

The Government of Nepal set up the OSH policy in 2076 to show its commitment to improving workers' rights and supporting a safe and healthy work environment in order to increase productivity. The goal of the policy is to make sure that the workplace is safe by putting OSH standards and steps into place. Notably, the government made noise and light standards for the workplace in 2073 B.S., which were written up in the Nepal Gazette on Asar 25, 2074 B.S. Also in 2074, directives and guidelines were made for the brick business that focused on the health and safety of workers on the job. Several International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions deal with work, the working surroundings, and the safety and health of workers in general on the job. For example, the Nepal Gazette and other related government documents would be the main sources for putting out standards and guidelines for occupational safety and health in Nepal.

But, even though it's good that the government is trying to set up OSH policies and standards, it's important to look at the standards' flaws and limits. Even though the text doesn't say what the weaknesses of the standards are, some of them could be that there aren't enough ways to make sure they are followed, there aren't enough resources for putting them into place and keeping track of them, and there might be holes in how they deal with new occupational dangers. More study and analysis are needed to fully figure out where the OSH standards in Nepal are weak and suggest ways to make them better (OSH Profile for Nepal, 2020).

Methodology

There haven't been many scientific studies done on how safe and healthy the garment business in Nepal yet. From the little information that is available, it seems that safety and health on the job in Nepal created a strong demand for this study. This article is developed by identifying relevant secondary information from various sources. A pure qualitative and descriptive methodology has been applied for this article. The information is collected from books, reports, published articles,

and online platforms. The General Federation of Nepalese Trade Unions (GEFONT)'s report is also used to collect information on OSH practices in the garment industry. Additionally, the most recent information was obtained informally from a garment industry owner. The information thus collected is processed and synthesized. A critical explanatory approach to qualitative analysis is performed under the discussion and analysis section.

Results and Discussion

Overall, the study shows that the garment industry has bad safety and health practices at work. There are no specific studies about the safety of hand knitters, carpet makers, people who dye clothes, etc. The people who dye the clothes have to deal with the effects of the chemicals. Most workplaces, especially those that require more hard work and labor, don't have the right safety and prevention measures. Workers also don't know enough about the risks they face and how to reduce them. So, when things are like this, the government, employers, and workers should all step in right away and take strong action. The study shows that most Nepalese fabric workers have vertigo, headaches, low backaches, joint pain, trouble breathing, anemia, diseases that affect women, and dysentery. Based on secondary sources and conversations with owners of garment factories, this study comes to the conclusion that most of the people who work in this field have some kind of musculoskeletal disease. People who worked in the sewing area were more likely to have problems with their muscles and joints. Musculoskeletal disorders are strongly linked to age, gender, and school level. The room for each worker to work is very small. There were no toilets or places to get medical help. The workers have to stay late almost every day. A study by Med (2020) found that 48.5% of textile workers had problems with their muscles and joints. The low back (67%) and shoulders (26% of the time) are the most common places where it shows up. Most workers (82%) say that their pain sometimes comes on when they have a lot of work to do. Musculoskeletal disorders have been linked

to age, gender, and level of schooling. A garment manufacturing unit is a complicated, multifaceted physical work setting with interactions between workplace dimensions, inappropriate, non-neutral, and awkward postures, and fast piece-rate production. Workers don't come up with new ideas and don't get a cut of the profits, and their highly specialized skills can't be used anywhere else. So, they have nothing to fall back on if the business goes under and buyers from the West just take their money and go somewhere else. They don't know why the industry comes and goes or how it pollutes the environment and makes urban poverty worse in Nepal (ILO, 2021).

Conclusions

The safety and health of workers in Nepal, particularly those in the garment industry, are a major concern. Studies have shown that musculoskeletal disorders are prevalent among garment workers, and that workplace hazards and inadequate resources to mitigate their effects are common. The Nepal Labour Act of 2017 has provisions for occupational safety and health, but there is a need for more comprehensive studies and sector-specific regulations to address the specific risks faced by workers in different industries. Employers must ensure that workers have access to personal protective equipment, and that they receive regular health check-ups and training on safety measures. The government must also take a more active role in enforcing regulations and providing support for workers' health and safety. By prioritizing occupational safety and health, Nepal can create a safer and healthier work environment for its workers, and improve productivity and efficiency in the long run.

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