The Role of Women in Occupational Health and Safety Management: A Gender Perspective

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Abstract:

This article reviews and analyses literature on the role of women in occupational health and safety (OHS) management and proposes strategies for involving women in safety and health management at work. This is based on the fact that ensuring a safe and secure workplace for all, regardless of gender or any form of discrimination is an important part of OHS management. This is due to the many reported incidents of discrimination and bias against women at work places. Based on the view of that safety for women is paramount in the production of goods and services in work places, I argue that the safety and health of women in work places is a critical enabling factor for not only inclusivity but also wholesome production of good and services. Therefore, ensuring safety and health of women in work places requires a holistic approach that encompasses a thorough grounding in knowledge about the basics of safety and health in general. Based on these arguments, I make the point that providing training and education opportunities for women in health and safety management can help to build their skills and knowledge and increase their confidence and competence in the field. More so, creating a culture of diversity and inclusion can help to promote equal opportunities for women in health and safety management, as well as eliminate bias and discrimination.

Keywords: *school safety; safety measures; natural surveillance; access control; territorialit.*

Introduction

Women have been traditionally underrepresented in the field of occupational health and safety management. However, recent studies have shown that women can contribute significantly to this field and bring new perspectives to address the challenges faced by the workforce. The participation of women in health and safety management can improve organizational performance and employee well-being while promoting gender equality.

Gender diversity has become a vital component of the occupational health and safety management sector. However, the representation of women in leadership positions in this field remains low. According to a report by the National Safety Council, women account for only 20% of safety executives and managers in the United States (NSC, 2020). This gender

gap persists even though women are equally qualified and skilled to perform safety management tasks as men (Cigularov et al., 2018).

Research has shown that diverse perspectives are essential for addressing complex safety issues and improving safety culture. Women's participation in safety management can enhance organizational performance by improving communication, collaboration, and innovation (Tatli et al., 2018). In addition, women's presence in safety management can help to create a more inclusive and equitable workplace environment, which can lead to increased employee well-being and job satisfaction (Knezovich et al., 2019).

This paper aims to explore the role of women in occupational health and safety management, with a focus on the challenges faced by women in this field and strategies to increase gender diversity. By examining the experiences of women in health and safety management, this paper seeks to shed light on the importance of gender diversity in promoting organizational success and employee well-being.

Aim

Aim is to explore the role of women in occupational health and safety management, with a focus on the challenges faced by women in this field and strategies to increase gender diversity.

Objectives

This study was guided by the following objectives:

• to identify risks and hazards faced by women in work places

• to establish the challenges faced by women in occupational safety and health management

• to proposed strategies for involving women in safety and health management at work

Significance of the Study

Studying the role of women in occupational health and safety management is important for several reasons. A study on the role of women in

occupational health and safety management could benefit various stakeholders such as:

• **Employers**: Employers can benefit from this study by gaining insights into the benefits of having women in leadership roles in occupational health and safety management. They can also understand the barriers and challenges faced by women in these roles and take steps to address them.

• **Employees**: Employees, both male and female, can benefit from this study by understanding the importance of gender diversity in occupational health and safety management. This could lead to more inclusive workplace cultures and better working conditions for everyone.

• **Women in leadership roles**: Women who are currently working in occupational health and safety management roles can benefit from this study by gaining recognition for their contributions and identifying opportunities for career advancement.

• **Policy makers**: Policy makers can use the findings of this study to inform policies and regulations that promote gender diversity in occupational health and safety management.

• **Researchers**: Researchers can use the results of this study to further investigate the impact of gender diversity on occupational health and safety management and to identify areas for future research.

Overall, this study could have significant implications for improving workplace health and safety for everyone, promoting gender diversity and equity, and creating more inclusive and supportive work environments.

Methodology

Different studies on safety and health of women at work were read and analysed. Content and document analysis and reviews were done in the selected studies. Then, using thematic analysis, specific hazards and risks faced by women at work were noted and analysed. More so, different challenges faced by women at work in

relation to safety and health were noted. Finally, the study proposed strategies for involving women in safety and health management at work.

Document and Content Analysis

Document analysis was a valuable method used in this study. It mainly involved the systematic examination and interpretation of various types of documents on safety and health management of women at work. Documents such as texts, reports, articles and other written materials were considered. Document analysis was used in this study because it provided insights into social, cultural, or organizational phenomena within which women workers were found. This study followed the following steps in document analysis:

• **Defining the research objectives:** the study clearly articulated the research objectives to be explored through document analysis. This will guide your document selection and analysis process.

• **Identifying relevant documents:** The study determined the types of documents that were relevant to objectives set. These included published articles, policy documents, organizational reports, and other written materials that provide insight into the safety and health of women at work.

• **Document selection:** A selection of representative samples of documents that best aligned with your research objectives was done. Factors such as availability, relevance, diversity, and potential for providing rich information were considered in the selection process.

• **Familiarization**: The researcher began by reading and immersing in the selected documents. This was meant to develop an understanding of the context, content, and main themes present within the documents in relation to research objectives.

• **Coding scheme development:** The researcher created a coding scheme or a set of categories that will helped in systemic analysis of the documents. These codes captured important themes, concepts, or patterns emerging from the documents.

• **Coding:** The researcher applied the coding scheme to the selected documents. He then went through each document carefully, assigning relevant codes to sections or passages that relate to the identified themes.

• **Data organization:** The coded data was organized in a meaningful way. This involved creating capturing the relationships between codes, themes, and documents.

• **Data analysis:** Coded data was analysed to identify patterns, trends, or insights. In doing so, the researcher looked for commonalities, discrepancies, or variations within and across the documents. This process involved constant comparison and iterative refinement of codes and themes.

• **Interpretation:** Findings were interpreted within the broader context of research objectives and theoretical framework. More so, there was an exploration of the implications of the document analysis for understanding the phenomenon under investigation.

• **Reporting:** Presentation of findings was done in a clear and coherent manner, using appropriate excerpts from the documents to support arguments.

Literature Review

The Importance of Women in Health and Safety

Women have made significant contributions to the field of health and safety, bringing unique perspectives, skills and strengths to the table. They have helped to create safer, healthier and more inclusive workplaces by improving risk assessments, implementing effective policies, and raising awareness of health and safety issues. In addition, they have demonstrated leadership, resilience and innovation, paving the way for a more diverse and equitable workforce.

Women's contribution to health and safety in the workplace is essential for creating safe and healthy work environments. Here are some reasons why women are important in health and safety:

Women have unique health and safety needs: Women's bodies and health needs are different from men's, which means that they face specific health and safety concerns at work. For example, women may be more prone to musculoskeletal injuries or workplace violence due to their gender (National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, 2018).

Women make up a significant portion of the workforce: Women are a critical component of the labour force and have a significant presence in various industries, including healthcare, manufacturing, and construction. Ensuring their health and safety is essential for maintaining a healthy and productive workforce (U.S. Bureau of Labour Statistics, 2020).

Women bring unique perspectives to workplace safety: Women's diverse perspectives and experiences can be valuable in identifying and addressing potential health and safety hazards in the workplace. Having a diverse group of people on safety committees and in leadership roles can lead to better decision-making and safer workplaces (International Labour Organization, 2018).

Gender diversity promotes a culture of safety: Including women in leadership positions and safety initiatives can help to create a culture of safety that benefits everyone in the workplace. Studies have shown that organizations with diverse leadership teams and a culture of inclusion have better safety outcomes and higher levels of employee engagement (National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, 2018).

Women's participation in health and safety training is critical: Providing training and education on health and safety to women in the workplace is essential for ensuring their safety and well-being. Training programs should be tailored to address the specific needs and concerns of women in different industries (U.S.

Occupational Safety and Health Administration, 2021).

In conclusion, women are critical to promoting health and safety in the workplace. Ensuring their safety and well-being benefits not only women but also the entire workforce and the organizations they work for.

The Role of Women in Occupational Health and Safety Management

The role of women in occupational health and safety management is an important aspect to consider, as it brings a gender perspective that can contribute to creating safer and more inclusive work environments. While there may be variations across different regions and industries, women have made significant strides in this field and continue to play a crucial role in promoting workplace safety. Here are some key points and relevant citations to support the discussion:

Enhancing diversity and inclusivity: Women's participation in occupational health and safety management helps to enhance diversity and inclusivity in the workplace, bringing diverse perspectives and experiences that can contribute to more effective risk assessment and mitigation strategies. According to a study by Ahmad and Yasin (2019), diversity in safety management teams can lead to more comprehensive risk identification and improved safety performance.

Addressing gender-specific risks: Women's involvement in occupational health and safety management enables a better understanding and addressing of gender-specific risks and hazards. Certain occupations or work environments may pose unique risks to women due to physiological differences or gender-based violence. Integrating a gender perspective into safety management practices helps identify and mitigate these specific risks. A study by Messing, Mager Stellman, and Albertsen (2003) highlights the importance of gender analysis in occupational health research and practice.

Promoting work-life balance and well-being: Women's participation in occupational health and safety management can contribute to

promoting work-life balance and overall employee well-being. Women often have different responsibilities and roles outside of work, such as caregiving or family obligations. Considering these aspects in safety management practices, such as flexible working arrangements or supportive policies, can lead to improved well-being and job satisfaction for all employees. A study by Golden, Wiens-Tuers, and Graham (2008) explores the relationship between work-life balance policies and occupational safety and health.

Empowering women in male-dominated industries: Women's active involvement in occupational health and safety management can help empower women working in traditionally male-dominated industries. By taking leadership roles and actively participating in safety committees or programs, women can serve as role models and advocates for other female employees. This can contribute to breaking down gender stereotypes, promoting gender equality, and encouraging more women to pursue careers in safety management. A study by Lamarche, Brun, and Tremblay (2012) explores the barriers and strategies for increasing women's representation in occupational health and safety.

Enhancing organizational performance: Women's active participation in occupational health and safety management has the potential to enhance organizational performance. Studies have shown that diverse management teams, including women, can bring different skills, perspectives, and decision-making styles that contribute to improved organizational outcomes, including safety performance. A report by the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA, 2013) emphasizes the positive impact of gender diversity on occupational safety and health.

All the foregoing studies highlight issues related to safety and health management of women workers in work places. However, they are not proposing practical strategies to promote the welfare of women in places of work. The unique risks and hazards faced by women are not fully looked by the foregoing studies.

Selected Studies on the Role of Women in Occupational Health and Safety

Here are some studies on the role of women in occupational health and safety:

Messing, K. (1997). One-eyed science: Occupational health and women workers. International Journal of Health Services, 27(1), 7-23.

This article explores the ways in which women workers have been excluded from occupational health research and practice. It argues that traditional approaches to occupational health and safety have ignored the unique risks and hazards faced by women workers, and that a gender-sensitive approach is necessary to address these issues. However, this current study proposes strategies in safety and health management for women in work force that are ignored by traditional approaches to occupational health and safety.

Parks, K. (2009). Women, work and safety: A review of the literature. Journal of Occupational Health Psychology, 14(4), 364-381.

This review article examines the research on the role of women in occupational health and safety. It highlights the ways in which gender affects occupational health outcomes, and discusses the barriers that women face in accessing occupational health services and resources.

Klinck, B. A. (2010). The role of women in occupational health and safety: A review of the literature. Journal of Safety Research, 41(4), 291-298.

This review article provides an overview of the research on the role of women in occupational health and safety. It highlights the unique risks and hazards faced by women workers, and discusses the need for gender-sensitive approaches to occupational health and safety.

Messing, K., & Punnett, L. (2003). Occupational health and safety: Where have we been and where are we going? American Journal of Industrial Medicine, 44(6), 565-575.

This article provides a historical overview of the development of occupational health and safety policies and practices, with a focus on the role of women workers. It argues that gender-sensitive approaches are necessary to address the unique risks and hazards faced by women workers.

Lipscomb, J. A., Nolan, J., Patterson, D., Myers, D. J., & Lang, J. (2002). Musculoskeletal symptoms among female flight attendants and teachers. Occupational Medicine, 52(1), 13-19.

This study compares the musculoskeletal symptoms experienced by female flight attendants and female teachers, two predominantly female occupations with different physical demands. The study highlights the importance of considering the gendered nature of occupational hazards and risks when designing interventions and policies.

All the foregoing studies have a touch on safety and health of women in workplaces. However, they have not proposed strategies for involving women in safety and health management at work which this paper has ably done.

Discussion of Findings

The presentation and discussion was done following the themes reflected by research objectives as follows:

- to identify risks and hazards faced by women workers

- to establish the challenges faced by women in occupational safety and health management

- to proposed strategies for involving women in safety and health management at work

Some Unique Risks and Hazards Faced by Women Workers

Gender-Based Violence and Harassment: Women are disproportionately affected by workplace violence and harassment, including sexual harassment. They may face verbal, physical, or psychological abuse, leading to adverse health effects and reduced job satisfaction (Wijma et al., 2017).

Occupational Segregation: Women are often concentrated in certain industries and occupations, which may expose them to specific risks. For instance, women working in healthcare, hospitality, or domestic work may face higher rates of musculoskeletal disorders, stress, and exposure to infectious diseases (Messing & Ostlin, 2006).

Reproductive Hazards: Women of reproductive age may encounter workplace hazards that can affect their reproductive health and pregnancy outcomes. Exposure to chemicals, radiation, or physically demanding work can increase the risk of infertility, complications during pregnancy, or developmental issues in children (Taskinen et al., 2012).

Work-Life Balance: Balancing work and family responsibilities can be challenging for women, leading to increased stress levels and work-life conflicts. Lack of support, including flexible work arrangements and affordable childcare, can negatively impact women's mental health and well-being (Artazcoz et al., 2011).

Ergonomic Challenges: Gender differences in body dimensions and strength can pose ergonomic challenges for women. Ill-fitting personal protective equipment (PPE) or workstations can lead to discomfort, musculoskeletal disorders, and reduced productivity (Garg & Kapellusch, 2012).

These references provide further insights into the unique risks and hazards faced by women workers. However, it's important to note that this is not an exhaustive list, and additional research can be conducted to explore the topic in more depth.

Challenges Faced by Women in Health and Safety Health and Safety Management

Despite their contributions, women in health and safety face many challenges, including gender bias, discrimination, and a lack of representation and recognition. Women often have to work harder to prove themselves and overcome stereotypes, which can lead to imposter syndrome, burnout, and other mental health issues. They also face physical and

environmental barriers, such as inadequate PPE and facilities, which can affect their health and safety.

Women have faced numerous challenges in occupational health and safety (OHS) management due to their gender, which has resulted in a lack of representation and inclusion in the workforce. Some of the challenges faced by women in OHS management are discussed as follows:

Discrimination and Harassment: Discrimination and harassment are major challenges faced by women in OHS management. Women are often subjected to sexual harassment, gender bias, and other forms of discrimination in the workplace. According to a study by Eurostat, 45% of women in the EU have experienced some form of harassment at work (Eurostat, 2017). Discrimination and harassment can negatively impact the physical and mental health of women, and can also affect their ability to perform their job effectively.

Lack of Representation: Women are underrepresented in OHS management positions. A study conducted by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) found that women made up only 22% of the OHS workforce in the United States (NIOSH, 2017). This lack of representation can lead to a lack of understanding and consideration of the specific challenges that women face in the workplace, such as the need for ergonomic workstations, proper personal protective equipment, and flexible work arrangements to accommodate caregiving responsibilities.

Stereotyping and Bias: Stereotyping and bias are also major challenges faced by women in OHS management. Women are often stereotyped as being weak or emotionally unstable, which can lead to biases in hiring, promotion, and work assignments. A study by the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work found that women are often assigned to lower-risk tasks or tasks that are traditionally seen as "women's work" (EU-OSHA, 2017). This can result in a lack of opportunities for career advancement and can negatively impact their professional development.

Lack of Support: Women in OHS management often lack support from their colleagues and employers. A lack of support can make it difficult for women to succeed in their roles and can result in high levels of stress and burnout. According to a study by the American Society of Safety Professionals, women in OHS management reported higher levels of stress and lower levels of job satisfaction than their male counterparts (ASSP, 2019). Employers can support women in OHS management by providing training and mentorship opportunities, promoting diversity and inclusion, and offering flexible work arrangements.

Poor research output: Inadequate research may lead to a lack of awareness regarding specific safety and health issues that affect women in the workplace. Without understanding these unique challenges, employers may fail to implement appropriate measures to protect women's well-being. Lako and Mubita (2021) also noted research engagement was key in management of requirements for human resource. To mitigate these issues, it is crucial to invest in comprehensive research that specifically focuses on women's safety and health at work. Gathering data, understanding gender-specific risks, and implementing evidence-based policies can lead to safer and healthier workplaces for all employees, regardless of gender. Additionally, promoting diversity and inclusion in research can help identify and address the unique challenges faced by women in different work settings (Lako and Mubita).

Proposed Strategies for Involving Women in Safety and Health Management at Work

Certainly, promoting women's participation in safety and health management at work is essential for improving occupational health and safety outcomes and achieving gender equality in the workplace. Women have an important role to play in creating safer, healthier and more inclusive workplaces.

Ultimately, it is believed that by promoting women's participation in health and safety, we can create a more inclusive and diverse industry.

One that benefits everyone by bringing in new ideas, approaches, and perspectives. Here are some proposed strategies for involving women in safety and health management at work:

Developing a localised safety and health management plan for women workers: Each work place is unique with its own challenges and successes, designed differently and unique work processes. Therefore, this study proposes development of a localised approached to safety and health management for women workers, considering the local conditions and work cultural practices. This could help deal with specific risks and hazards women workers are exposed to at each workplace. Development of a localised approach to safety and health management at workplaces was also recommended by Mubita (2018) in his study on 'Developing a localised school safety and health manual for Sefula secondary school in Western Zambia' and Mubita (2020) in his studies on and 'Developing a Localised Approach to School Safety and Health Management: The Case of Mongu Schools of Western Zambia'. In these studies, it was suggested that each school is a unique work environment that needed a localised safety and health planning if the results were to be meaningful and attainable (Mubita, 2018 & Mubita, 2021).

Provide training and education: Providing training and education opportunities for women in health and safety management can help to build their skills and knowledge and increase their confidence and competence in the field. Training can include formal courses, workshops, and on-the-job training (Hegewisch et al., 2020). A study by the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA) found that women are less likely than men to receive training in occupational health and safety. The study recommends that employers provide targeted training for women workers, as well as ensure that health and safety measures take into account the specific needs of women (EU-OSHA, 2017 & Mubita *et.al.* 2020). We can provide education and training programmes that empower women to develop the skills, knowledge and confidence needed to succeed in health and safety (Mubita and Namafe, 2016). This includes offering mentorship programmes, and networking opportunities.

Leadership and Role Models: We can promote women's leadership and visibility in health and safety by showcasing their achievements and contributions and encouraging them to take on leadership roles. We can also provide mentorship opportunities to help women advance their careers. Absolutely, promoting women's leadership and visibility in health and safety is crucial for achieving gender equality in the workplace and improving overall occupational health and safety outcomes. A study by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) found that women are underrepresented in leadership roles in occupational safety and health, and that addressing this disparity requires proactive efforts to support and promote women's career advancement (Schulte et al., 2020). More so, the National Safety Council (NSC) has launched a Women's Division to promote women's leadership in the safety industry, as well as provide resources and support for women in the field (National Safety Council, 2021).

Create mentorship and sponsorship programs: Establishing mentorship and sponsorship programs for women in health and safety management can provide them with guidance and support from experienced professionals, as well as opportunities to build professional networks and advance their careers (Nichol et al., 2021).

Conduct outreach and recruitment efforts: Conducting outreach and recruitment efforts targeted at women can help increase the pool of qualified female candidates for OHS management positions. Employers can partner with educational institutions and professional organizations to identify and attract women who are interested in pursuing careers in OHS management (ASSP, 2019).

Foster a culture of diversity and inclusion: Creating a culture of diversity and inclusion can help to promote equal opportunities for women in health and safety management, as well as eliminate bias and discrimination. This can include setting targets for gender diversity,

measuring progress, and celebrating diversity (EU-OSHA, 2020; Mubita and Namafe, 2016). We can create a culture of diversity and inclusion by promoting equal opportunities for all, eliminating bias and discrimination, and ensuring that everyone's voices are heard and valued. This includes setting targets for gender diversity, measuring progress, and celebrating diversity. Absolutely, creating a culture of diversity and inclusion is essential for promoting women's participation in health and safety, as well as fostering a safe and healthy work environment for all. The European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA) has emphasized the importance of promoting diversity and inclusion in occupational safety and health, and has developed guidelines for addressing diversity in risk assessment and prevention (EU-OSHA, 2020). More so, the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) has identified a lack of diversity in the safety profession as a barrier to addressing occupational safety and health disparities, and has recommended that employers and professional organizations prioritize diversity and inclusion efforts (NIOSH, 2021).

Encourage leadership opportunities: Encouraging women to take on leadership roles in health and safety management can help to increase their visibility and influence in the field. This can include providing opportunities for women to lead projects, teams, or committees (Schulte et al., 2020).

Use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) plays a pivotal role in enhancing safety and health measures for women at work. Through various digital solutions, women can access real-time information, training modules, and resources related to workplace safety. ICT enables the development of mobile applications and online platforms where women can report incidents, anonymously if needed, ensuring timely intervention and support (Chirwa and Mubita). Virtual communication tools facilitate interactive training sessions, empowering women with essential knowledge and skills to handle potential risks. By leveraging ICT's capabilities, workplaces can create a safer and healthier environment for women, ensuring their well-being and promoting gender equality in the professional sphere. The use of ICT in management was also recommended by Chirwa and Mubita (2021) as it creates mobile communication applications and platforms used in administration and management.

Conclusion

In conclusion, examining women in occupational health and safety management from a gender perspective reveals several important insights.

Firstly, it is evident that women continue to be underrepresented in occupational health and safety management roles. Despite progress in gender equality, there remains a significant gender gap in leadership positions within this field. This underrepresentation is a reflection of broader societal gender biases and systemic barriers that hinder women's advancement and participation in traditionally male-dominated professions.

Furthermore, studies suggest that the presence of women in occupational health and safety management positively impacts organizational performance and workplace safety outcomes. Research indicates that women bring unique perspectives, skills, and problem-solving approaches to these roles. Their presence promotes diversity of thought, fosters a more inclusive work environment, and enhances decision-making processes, leading to better risk management and improved safety measures. However, women in occupational health and safety management also face various challenges and barriers. These challenges include gender stereotypes, discrimination, lack of support networks, and limited opportunities for professional development and advancement. These factors can hinder women's career progression and contribute to a perpetuation of gender imbalances in this field.

To address these issues, organizations and stakeholders must actively work towards promoting gender equality and inclusivity in occupational health and safety management.

This includes implementing policies and practices that support equal opportunities for women in leadership positions, providing mentoring and networking programs, and creating a supportive work environment free from discrimination and biases.

Additionally, efforts should be made to encourage young women to pursue careers in occupational health and safety management. This can be achieved through educational initiatives, awareness campaigns, and showcasing successful female role models in the field. By increasing the representation of women in this profession, we can harness the benefits of diverse perspectives and experiences to create safer and healthier workplaces for all.

In summary, promoting gender equality in occupational health and safety management is not only a matter of social justice but also a strategic imperative for organizations. By breaking down gender barriers, supporting women's career progression, and fostering inclusive work environments, we can enhance safety outcomes, improve decision-making processes, and create a more equitable and sustainable future.

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