

E3 Journal of Business Management and Economics Vol.2(3). pp. 125-131, September, 2011  
Available online <http://www.e3journals.org/JBME>  
ISSN 2141-7482 © 2011 E3 Journals

*Full length research paper*

# **A study of health and safety practices in small and medium sized enterprises: -A case of Botswana.**

**Josephine Moeti-Lysson and Rudolph L. Boy\***

The University of Botswana, Department of Management, P.M.B 254/590, Gaborone  
Botswana

Accepted 20 August 2011

**The purpose of this research is to understand the views of different employees in small and medium enterprises about what can be done to improve the health and safety in work places. In order to carry out this research, questionnaires were used to collect the views of different employees concerning this topic in these organizations, and literature was also reviewed. From the findings, it shows that when good health and safety practices are not put in place, accidents ,major and minor injuries can happen, and it is what most of the employees in other companies have so far experienced. This implies that if health and safety is not managed effectively, both the two parties being employees and the organization would suffer because for the organization to function effectively, it needs employees and for the people to survive, they need to work.**

**Keywords:** Health; Safety; Injury; Accident.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Worker's Safety and Health are critical elements in every work setting. A safe working environment cuts absenteeism, companies' insurance bills and enhances productivity. The problem of occupational health and safety presents a serious challenge to most organizations in Botswana. Both Employers and Trade Unions must play a leading role in identifying hazards, educating members and helping in protecting their members against work hazards. Prevention of the workplace accidents and infections should be an integral part in an effective and coherent strategy for a number of reasons. This is in recognition of the fact that industrial accidents can have a negative impact both on the well-being or morale of employees and on the productivity of the workplace.

The employer has a common legal duty to assess the work place in order to provide a safe working environment for his employees. Where an employee is

injured at work and institutes a delictual claim against the employer, the employee will succeed if he or she can prove intent or negligence on the part of the employer or of a co-employee if the employer was to be found vicariously liable (Botswana workmen's Compensation Act 1998). Similarly, if an employee contracts a disease and it can be proved that the disease arose out of or in the course of his employment due to the nature of the work, he is engaged upon, the employer has a common legal duty to compensate the employee for damages suffered in consequence of the disease.

Recently, there has been a resurgence of interest in the relationship between employees and employers. Therefore due to these rapid innovations the trade unions should take part in a national debate about the uses and consequences of these new developments.

Therefore, the important thing is to try finding out how the employment relations are. For instance, in Botswana labour disputes mainly in the public sector have become a worrisome phenomenon. Year 2010 in particular was characterised by a number on strike actions and demonstrations. Both secondary and junior school teachers' boycotted invigilation of examinations and the

---

\*Corresponding Author Email: [rudolphboy@mopipi.ub.bw](mailto:rudolphboy@mopipi.ub.bw); Tel: + 267 3554078; Fax: + 267 3554580

highest institution of learning University of Botswana waged a five-day strike demanding better wages and working conditions. In the construction industry most predominantly the Chinese companies had labour disputes which affected completion of projects. (Kehakgametse, 2010). A lot of literature addressed this but there is a considerable gap in that health and safety on the employee's practices in small and medium enterprises were not studied in Botswana and we have not found any substantial literature on it. Therefore the research being proposed will attempt to close this gap.

### Literature review

According to Ragin (2007), health and safety is a universal element that needs to be taken into consideration especially in small and medium enterprises as it is becoming a major problem for employers in the world. Taylor (1998) continues to add that health and safety of employees in small and medium enterprises has long been ignored in Africa and as a result there are increasing cases of accidents occurring in small and medium enterprises. There is usually lack of management support in small and medium enterprises as most of them look at maximizing of profits instead of improving the working conditions hence the results are poor health and safety of the employees. Moreover, companies don't develop the risk management system hence increased numbers of accidents. Some small business owners lack experience on the recent technology and machinery designed in developed countries hence end up not using them properly leading to accidents.

As per Kandwaty (1997) if management fails to provide a safe and satisfying work climate, workers should respond by absenteeism, lateness or deliberately working slowly. Due to some financial constraints both enterprises end up finding themselves not employing a range of health and wellness initiatives to address health improvement in workplaces. In response to this, Botswana has established Factories Act (Chapter 44:01) which has stipulated some guidelines on how to exercise the good health and safety of employees. Section 51 of Part VII of Factories Act stipulate that in every factory which is in connection with any process carried on where dust or fume or any other impurity of such a character and to such an extent as to be likely to be injurious or offensive to the person employed, all practical measures should be taken to protect the persons employed. Section 53 of the same Act continues to add that where workers are employed in any process involving excessive

exposure to wet or to any injurious or offensive substance, suitable protective clothing and appliances, including where necessary, suitable gloves, footwear, goggles, head or face coverings or any other necessary clothing or appliance required by the chief inspector, shall be provided and maintained for the use of such workers.

In different small, medium enterprises, a lot of accidents and injuries do occur to employees involved, which could lead to permanent disability or the victim having to leave the work afterwards. These accidents happen in different places e.g. construction sites as some companies do not provide protective clothing for their employees'. The absence of protective clothing increases the risk of being accident prone.

Research on occupational health practice in SADC countries reveal that "workers are exposed to new chemical, psychosocial and physical hazards that are emerging from new forms of industrial processes and work organization" (Loewenson, 1998). Studies have also shown that occupational injury, illness and fatality currently accounts for significant losses, with over 3% GDP losses annually due to these causes. This means investments in occupational health and safety can thus bring gains in productivity and market access (Loewenson, 1998). According to Burlington (2000), there are costs to be borne both in the prevention of accidents and the provision of a safe working environment as well as the cost of any accident, for example cost incurred for replacing damaged materials and tools.

Some organizations offer medical insurance as part of their benefits package, but this can be expensive. It would be just as sensible to spend time performing an audit of staff health before there was a need to take remedial medical action. This may mean organizations getting actively involved in the wellbeing of their staff by educating them about the problems associated with poor diet, smoking stress and alcohol abuse to name a few. By taking an active part in the prevention of disease the organization retains its workforce, any costs associated with prevention can be offset against potential absenteeism Taylor, (1998). The International Labor Organization (ILO) formulates international labour standards in the form of Conventions and Recommendations setting minimum standards of basic labour rights: freedom of association, the right to organize, collective bargaining, abolition of forced labour, equality of opportunity and treatment, and other standards regulating conditions across the entire spectrum of work related issues. It provides technical assistance primarily in the fields of: employment policy, labour law and industrial relations, working conditions, labour statistics and occupational safety and health.

Poor employee health and safety according to Goetsch, (1995) has got some negative effects. The overall costs of accidents include such factors as lost wages, medical expenses, insurance administration, fire related losses and indirect costs. There is also dissatisfaction with work hence the elements of the job and the work environment are believed to have a role to play in explaining absence patterns. Fitzpatrick (1989), cited evidence of general boredom with the job and poor working conditions as factors which contributed to dissatisfaction in the workplace.

Senai (2008), stated that the government of Botswana interest on the area of occupational health and safety has grown and developed over the years for instance companies like Water Utilities Cooperation have adopted the concept of and undertook to implement safety and health in the early 1990's, safety awareness teams were also established around 1992 to come up with a systematic and structured method of implementation and monitoring safety in the workplace. Therefore, there should be a cause of concern for organizations and employees given that social, physical and psychological well being of workers depends on a safe work environment.

Employees of Sinohydro, a Chinese company contracted to build the P1.3 billion dam and access road at Dikgatlhong have painted a picture of deteriorating relationship between them and the company. Presenting their concerns before the Parliamentary labour relations committee, the employees' representative, said workers were dismissed for being vocal on workers' rights. Recently, he said, members of a welfare committee were shown the door for articulating workers' needs. He also said Sinohydro Corporation hired employees on one-month contract basis, which was changed from the initial agreement of one year. He informed the committee that the overall safety standard in the site was low and hazardous, citing safety boots, which he said were not water resistant while at times new employees went for a long time without being issued with safety equipment. He said employers followed a wrong procedure of forcefully deducting employees' salaries for damaging and improper use of construction equipment. He said there was still a problem of communication barrier at the site between the employers who speak Chinese only and employees who speak English and Setswana. This, he said, at times resulted in physical fights. These projects include dams, stadiums, airports; all

these major projects worth P20 billion circulating within 25 Chinese constructors. Kehakgametse (2010).

## **METHODOLOGY**

The universal population of our research is twenty construction and ten cleaning companies situated in Gaborone, Botswana. Two organizations (Landscape Cleaning Company and China Civil Engineering Company) will participate in this research. The sample size comprised the above mentioned enterprises and there were eighty questionnaires given out to the respondents. In order to acquire sampling frame, individuals had to complete the blank space by writing their type of job. This was to identify the number of different types of employees in different organizations that are exposed to risks that affect their health and safety, Saunders et al., (2007). A sample was drawn out of the target population using the simple random sampling technique (a probability sampling technique). The sampling technique was used as it was fair in that it gives all members of the population equal chances of being chosen to constitute the sample and in effect this technique will help eliminate biasness or the likelihood of choosing certain members of the population to be in the sample Hussey et al (1997). The sample was made up of eighty respondents with thirty five of the respondents being from Landscape Cleaning Company, and forty five from China Civil Engineering Company.

### **Instrument used for data collection**

A combination of research methods and techniques were used to collect data. These included among others, observation, personal interviews and focused group discussions. The researcher used a self administered qualitative questionnaire containing two types of questions: closed and open ended questions. The Narrative analysis analytical approach was used to analyze the data that has been collected for it to convey meaning to people. According to Saunders et al., 2007:504, a narrative is broadly defined as an account of an experience told in sequenced way indicating a flow of related events that when taken together are significant to the narrator and convey meaning to the researcher.

Closed-ended questions would offer the respondents with a list of responses from which they would be required to choose from while the open ended-questions would enable the respondents to give their general reactions to the questions thus providing the researcher with a rich array of data. Understanding the deeper issues which quantitative research bury in figures is critical in exploring the underlying motives. A questionnaire survey was conducted and in addition

physical observations were also conducted on construction sites in order to relate questionnaire responses to what is actually obtained on construction sites. The study was limited to Gaborone only. The subject instrument is informed by the reviewed literature to further validate the instrument, it was circulated for review by fellow academics in the management discipline.

A total of 52 respondents responded in the research, all of them mostly of the lower class who worked in two different small and medium enterprises.

### Data analyses

Data collected was analyzed in consideration of research objectives and questions. This was done using a narrative analysis to tell the stories that were narrated by the respondents during data collection in conjunction with SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Science version 18.0 ) to provide tables and charts representation of the data.

## FINDINGS

### Demographics

The majority of the respondents that made up the sample for this study were females with 59.6% as compared to males who made up just 40.4% of the sample, as shown in table 1 below.

The age group of between 25-35 was the most dominant in the sample with a 51% compared to the age groups of 15-25, 36-45 and above 46 years which made up 23.5%, 13.7% and 11.8% respectively. (Table 2) below show the above information relating to the respondents' age ‘

Out of fifty-two respondent's bricklayers were 5.4%, carpenters 4.1%, cleaners 52.7%, electrician 8.1%, JCB operator 4.1%, plasters 6.8%, site clerk 2.7%, still fixers 2.8%, tilers 4.1%, truck drivers 5.4% and welders 4.1%.

The level of education of the respondents were assessed in terms of those who went to primary school which is (25.7%),secondary (32.4%),teacher college (5.4%),technical college (12.2%),university (8.1%),and others being (16.2%).

### Salary

Table 3, below shows a collective representation of the

above information relating to the respondents' salary. Results showed that majority of respondents fell within the salary bracket of BWP 500-1000 which boasts an amazing 42.3% compared to other salary brackets of 1001-2000, 2001-3000, 3001-5000 and above 5000 which reflected percentages of 39.2%, 7.8%, 3.9% and 5.9% respectively.

### Working conditions

Commenting on the working conditions in which they operate under, the response of “very satisfied” dominated the responses with a 38.5%, while 30.1% are satisfied with the working conditions, 25% felt they are very dissatisfied and felt that they are working under poor working conditions and 5.8% did not respond to the question. One of the respondents who rated the workplace as poor, a welder by profession, lamented: “it is not safe because we are not protected against accidents that may happen due to machines that we use for cutting metals and bricks and in terms of clothing” .

To back up his story one of his colleagues also lamented on the safety issue by disclosing that the workplace is very small and cramped which becomes excessively hot because there is no proper ventilation.

Quizzed on whether or not they receive any harsh treatment from management, 19.3% said “no” because they say that management only becomes harsh with reasons, but 44.3% felt that they do receive unnecessary harsh treatment from management and as premises for supporting their option one respondent revealed that he has been insulted on more than one occasion by a supervisor and nothing was ever done about it. He mentioned that he did not query the matter because he fears losing his job hence he is forced to succumb to the treatment as he needs the job to support his family.

The findings revealed that most of the respondents don't have first aid kit in their company 47.3% , 20.27% not sure whether there is first aid kit in their company or not and 32.43 % of respondents have first aid kit in their company. The respondents felt that hazardous method of handling equipment was the leading cause of poor health and safety and insufficient safety instructions followed after. This could be attributed to the fact that organizations do not train their employees on how to handle different equipment. Concerning safety instructions, majority of the people doing risky jobs are illiterate and uneducated, in that way, they cannot read the laid down instructions and are not fluent in foreign languages that can be used e.g. English as some of the organizations are run by foreigners mostly Chinese.

**Table 1:** sex of respondent

valid	frequency	percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
1	21	40.4	40.4	40.4
2	31	59.6	59.6	100.0
total	52	100.0	100.	

**Table 2:** Age of respondent

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	15-25	12	23.1	23.5	23.5
	25-35	26	50.0	51.0	74.5
	36-45	7	13.5	13.7	88.2
	46 and above	6	11.5	11.8	100.0
	Total	51	98.1	100.0	
Missing	9	1	1.9		
Total		52	100.0		

**Table 3:** Monthly income

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	P500-P1000	22	42.3	42.3	42.3
	P1001-P2000	21	40.4	40.4	82.7
	P2001-P3000	4	7.7	7.7	90.4
	P3001-P5000	2	3.8	3.8	94.2
	Above P5000	3	5.8	5.8	100.0
Total		52	100.0	100.0	

52% of the respondents suggested that safety training and education workshops, if they were conducted to raise the awareness on health and safety could be used as an intervention method to reduce the practices of poor health and safety in their companies because when employees and employers are involved in workshops they can be able to express their concerns on how to improve health and safety in the organization.

### Trade union and pay

Commenting on their union membership status the response of "no" dominated the responses with a 82.7%, while 15.4% are members and 1.9% did not respond to the question.

The fear of losing jobs by workers and their inability to afford union fees because they are being paid close to nothing poses a major challenge for trade unions seeking to organize and defend workers. Employers know this, and take advantage of it by looking for a flexible, compliant workforce who will not question his/her employers. The minimum wage must cover the living expenses of the employee and his/her family members. Moreover it must relate reasonably to the general level of wages earned and the living standard of other social groups, but practically that is not the case as companies tend to pay their workers low wages. The researchers came to a conclusion that construction companies do not provide liveable wages to their employees' as majority of the respondents that took part in the study indicated that they earn a salary/ wage of between BWP 500-1000 and

when looking at this wage scale it cannot at all meet the basic needs considering the current cost of living that is on the rise.

## DISCUSSION

Health and safety are important factors that many organizations should provide to all of their employees if the management wants to be successful. Poor health and safety occurs to different workers especially those working in unfavorable conditions like in construction companies because these employees usually are ignorant about their safety rights, don't have trade unions to represent their needs in work places.

From the study, it was learned that poor health and safety practices is a problem to employees in many organizations, especially foreign owned companies that are only doing certain projects temporarily. The data collected indicated that because of only caring about the organization success and ignoring employees' health and safety, most employees experienced low productivity in doing their work and some left before the agreed time. If workers' health is ignored and they only be regarded as machine for production, whatever work is done, less effort would be put, resulting in poor quality work e.g. buildings that would collapse and kill a lot of people as is usually the case with other buildings of poor quality or companies if doing their construction in a contract (for an agreed time) ending up not finishing in the agreed time.

Ragin (2007), argued that safety and health professionals cannot do their jobs effectively without cooperation and day to day assistance of first line supervisors. According to him, providing a safe and healthy workplace for employees, supervisors and safety professionals must be partners. Supervisors should be assigned responsibility for the work environment and for the safety of employees in their units. Therefore, safety and health professionals should be readily available to help.

Despite positive statistics which indicates rising employment, in real terms however the quality of life for the workers has not profoundly changed. This is true especially for the developing nations (Diekie, 2003) and to a lesser extent in developed countries (Purcell, 1996). The main challenge is how organizations can use human resource development strategy to create decent paying and fulfilling jobs. It is evident from our study that the level of pay is very low in the small and medium enterprises sector.

Based on the responses submitted by the respondents, the researcher can conclude that due to lack of unionism

by employees this has resulted in poor working conditions, low pay and insecure employment. Therefore it can be deduced that indeed the respondents felt that the organizations which they work for do not comply with the labor laws in the country, in that they are subjected to long working hours which means they exceed normal working hours thus under normal circumstances they should be paid for the extra hours worked which is not a reality in the construction sector that were surveyed and this amounts to exploitation of workers (Weymes 2005). And the above sentiments were also shared by the parliamentary labour committee:

The parliamentary labour relations committee has expressed concern that most Batswana are oblivious of their rights as workers. When addressing a press conference in Gaborone, the committee chairperson, said employees must be taught about labour laws and their rights. He stated that as a labour relations committee, they had been conducting a consultative tour around the central and northern parts of the country. He said the committee also addressed workers grievances and labour relations issues with the mines, farms and lodges. The committee also observed that there was still low level of understanding of existing labour laws by the employers and employees.

The committee chairperson who is also a member of parliament said the committee had also observed that incidences of employers deducting money from workers' salaries without their consent were rampant. He stated that they also realized that there were no employment record from some companies and some employers were not complying with tax obligation. "We have realised that there are some expatriates who are working without residents and work permits, In some industries some workers are employed on one month contracts and this disadvantages them as they cannot borrow money from commercial banks," he said. He concluded that the committee was concerned by the protracted labour disputes even when there was legitimate expectation by employees (Kehakgametse, 2010)

## Conclusion

It should be a legal requirement for all businesses in Botswana to consult with employees on workplace health and safety which may affect them in the workplace. This requirement should be contained in Factories Act 1973 as a 'Duty to Consult'.

The best outcomes in Occupational Health Safety come when employees are involved in the process.

Consulting with employees and having a formal mechanism to do this is an effective way of involving employees in workplace safety.

Consultation meetings will need to be conducted from time to time and companies will need to keep records of this consultation. Consultation should be required under the Factories Act 1973 and the following should be covered: decisions are being made about measures to eliminate or control risks; introducing or changing procedures used to monitor the risks (eg. health surveillance); decisions about facilities for welfare of employees; changes are proposed which could affect health, safety, or welfare. This includes changes to premises, systems of work, methods of work, plant or substances use for work; deciding about consultation arrangements to be used;

There should be sharing of relevant information about Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) and welfare with employees and given the opportunity to express their views and to contribute in a timely fashion to the resolution of OHS and welfare issues at their place of work; and their views of employees are valued and taken into account.

Though this research was confined to Gaborone, it is fair to suggest that results reflect a general picture of workers situation in the small and medium enterprises in the construction sector. In recent years especially 2010 there has been a ground swell of discontent about employment conditions of employees. Members of the public, members of parliament and the employees themselves have complained about the bad employment conditions of workers in this sector. Poor remuneration, long working hours, poor or lack of benefits, part-time/causal work, low unionism and job insecurity, racism are some of the problems faced by workers. Therefore, there is need for government, to consider ways for protecting workers through legislation for example raising minimum wage to a decent pay rate. Also trade unions should broaden their membership base and include workers who are vulnerable to exploitation by employers such as those working in the construction sector.

#### References

- Botswana Workmen's Compensation Act (1998), Gaborone Botswana, Government Printers
- Botswana Factory Act (1973), Gaborone, Government Printers
- Burlington MA (2000). Core management for human resource students and practitioners, Elsevier Butterworth (Britain): Heinemann publishers
- Hussey J, Hussey C (1997). Business Research: A Practical Guide for Undergraduate and Postgraduate Students. Palgrave: MacMillan
- International Labour Office. (1997). World Labour Report 1997-98: Industrial relations, democracy and social stability (Geneva, ILO).
- Kehakgametse M (2010). Labour ministry officials study Chinese. Botswana Mmegi.

- Kandwaty G (1997). Introduction to work study, RSA, Stotaville Publishers
- Loewenson R (1998). Health Impact of Occupational Risks in the Informal Sector in Zimbabwe. Intl. J. Occup. Environ Health. 4(4): 264-274
- Purcell K (1996). The relationship between career and job opportunities: women's employment in the hospitality industry as a microcosm of women's employment. Women in Manage. Rev., 11(5): 17-24.
- Ragin D (2007). Physical health (Exploring positive relationships at work and building a theoretical and research foundation, New Jersey (USA): Lawrence Erlbaum Associates
- Republic of Botswana. (2003). Employment Act, Chapter 47:01. Gaborone: Government Printer
- Saunders M, Lewis P, Thornhill A (2007). Research methods for business students, 4th Edition. Prentice Hall.
- Taylor S (1998). Employee Resourcing, Wiltshire (UK): The Crown well Press
- Weymes ED (2005). Organisations which make a difference: a philosophical argument for the "people focused organization". Corporate Governance, 5(2): 142-158.