

# The effectiveness of using occupational health and safety codes in protecting health sector workers

Raed Meshal Bin Atiyyah Albishri<sup>1</sup>, Nawaf abdulhakim onayzan alhuzali<sup>2</sup>, Hassan Abdulaziz Abdullah Albushra<sup>3</sup>, Abdullah Ayedh Mohammad Alkathiri<sup>4</sup>, Yasir Abdullah Ahmed Alatif<sup>5</sup>, Mushari Adel Nassir Alowaydhi<sup>6</sup>, Bassam Salem Bin Sulaiman Alhasani<sup>7</sup>, Meshal Mohammad Samran Almaramhi<sup>8</sup>, Fahad Rashed Saleh Alibrahim<sup>9</sup>, Saleh ahmed saeed alzahrani<sup>10</sup>, Abdalbary Owied Abdultif Allehyani<sup>11</sup>, Abdulrahman Dakhiallah bin Ahmad Alsubhi<sup>12</sup>, Ayed Mohammed Saud Alqahtani<sup>13</sup>, Ali Abdullah Ali Albarakati<sup>14</sup>, Ahmad Mansour Sorour Alsharif<sup>15</sup>

1. Health assistance-health care security, Alhamimah, PHC
2. Health assistance-health care security, Alzaymaa PHC
3. Health assistance-health care security, Ibn sena extended care hospital
4. Health assistance-health care security, Aljammom PHC
5. Health assistance-health care security, Ibn sena extended care hospital
6. Health assistance-health care security, Ibn sena extended care hospital
7. Health assistance-health care security, king Abdulaziz hospital
8. Health assistance-health care security, Hada Alsham PHC
9. Health assistance-health care security, Ibn sena extended care hospital
10. Health assistance-health care security, Abu Oroua PHC
11. Health assistance-health care security, king Abdulaziz hospital
12. Health assistance-health care security, king Abdulaziz hospital
13. Health assistance-health care security, Ibn sena extended care hospital
14. Health assistance-health care security, Shoqsan primary healthcare taif health cluster
15. Health assistance-health care security, Ibn sena extended care hospital

## Abstract

Occupational health and safety (OHS) are critical for protecting healthcare workers, ensuring quality healthcare delivery, and maintaining a resilient health workforce. Healthcare environments present unique challenges, including exposure to biological, chemical, and ergonomic hazards, as well as psychological stress. OHS codes provide a framework for addressing these risks through hazard identification, infection prevention, ergonomic safety, and mental health support. Despite their importance, barriers such as inadequate management commitment, resource constraints, complex regulations, and workplace culture hinder effective implementation. This research highlights the significance of OHS in safeguarding healthcare workers, explores challenges to compliance, and suggests strategies for fostering safer work environments. By prioritizing OHS, healthcare organizations can enhance worker safety, improve service quality, and support sustainable health systems.

**Keywords:** Occupational health and safety (OHS), Healthcare workers, Workplace hazards, Infection prevention and control, Ergonomic safety

## Introduction

Globally, there are 136 million workers in the health and social work sector, approximately 70% of whom are women. All these workers have the right to decent work, including protection of health and safety risk at work [1]. Occupational health and safety are considered one of the basic foundations that ensure a safe and healthy work environment for workers in the health sector, as this sector is characterized by its complex nature and major challenges associated with work, such as exposure to biological, chemical, and physical hazards, in addition to psychological pressures resulting from the nature of work [2].

Occupational health and safety rules are of particular importance in this context, as they contribute to protecting workers from occupational injuries and diseases resulting from work, and enhancing the quality of health services provided [3]. National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health of the United States defines a healthy and secure hospital environment as the absence of physical, chemical, biological, ergonomic, mechanical dangers related to the work, occupational diseases

caused by these dangers and risks and work accidents [4].

Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) is generally the science concerned with maintaining the safety and health of humans, facilities, production equipment, raw materials, and finished products, by providing safe working environments free from the causes of accidents, injuries, or occupational diseases. In other words, it is a set of

procedures, rules, and regulations within a legislative framework that aims to protect people from the risk of injury and preserve property from the risk of damage and loss [5].

This research aims to analyze the effectiveness of implementing occupational health and safety rules in protecting workers in the health sector, and to evaluate the extent of health institutions' commitment to these rules, with a focus on the challenges facing implementation and the opportunities available to enhance compliance with them.

### **Occupational health and safety codes in protecting health sector workers**

Providing occupational health and safety measures for protecting health workers and is also fundamental for well-functioning and resilient health systems, quality of care and maintaining a productive health workforce. However, the employees in hospitals face several risks, dangers, accidents, and occupational diseases caused by infections, drugs, the dangers of materials, waste, lack of ergonomic design, operating conditions, equipment failure, excess workload, and careless behavior of employees [6].

Occupational health and safety (OHS) codes are critical for protecting healthcare workers from a wide range of workplace hazards. These codes ensure that healthcare facilities implement measures to minimize risks and create a safe working environment. One of the primary elements of OHS codes is the requirement for hazard identification and risk assessment. Employers are mandated to identify potential risks specific to the healthcare environment, including biological, chemical, ergonomic, and physical hazards. Regular risk assessments help in recognizing these dangers and implementing preventive measures to safeguard workers [7].

A significant focus of OHS codes in the health sector is infection prevention and control. Healthcare workers are often exposed to infectious diseases, and OHS codes outline strict protocols for the use of personal protective equipment (PPE), safe handling of sharps, and proper disposal of medical waste. Vaccination programs, such as those for hepatitis B and influenza, are also emphasized to reduce the risk of disease transmission. Similarly, the management of chemical and biological hazards is a key aspect of these codes, ensuring the safe handling, storage, and disposal of hazardous materials with the support of Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS) and other informational resources [8].

Occupational safety is another essential component of OHS in healthcare. Healthcare workers frequently perform physically demanding tasks, such as lifting and moving patients, which can lead to musculoskeletal injuries. OHS codes address this by promoting training on proper manual handling techniques and the use of assistive devices. Alongside physical safety, mental health and stress management are integral aspects of OHS codes. The high-pressure nature of healthcare work often leads to burnout and stress. These codes advocate for providing counseling services, stress management resources, and mental health support to employees.

In addition to this, OHS codes require healthcare facilities to be prepared for emergencies. This includes having comprehensive response plans for situations such as fires, chemical spills, and infectious disease outbreaks, as well as conducting regular training and drills to ensure preparedness [9]. Workplace violence prevention is another critical area, with zero-tolerance policies for violence and training for workers on de-escalation techniques and protective measures. These provisions aim to create a safer and more secure work environment.

Finally, OHS codes emphasize training, education, and monitoring. Regular training programs are required to keep workers informed about safety protocols, hazard awareness, and the proper use of equipment. Reporting and monitoring systems ensure that workplace injuries, illnesses, or near misses are documented, promoting accountability and continuous improvement. Adherence to national labor laws and international standards, such as those set by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), is also a vital aspect of these codes, ensuring that workers' rights are protected and that healthcare facilities maintain high safety standards. Together, these measures form a comprehensive framework for protecting the health and well-being of healthcare workers while enhancing the overall quality of care they provide [4].

### **Important of occupational health and safety**

Work security is defined as the protection of workers from conditions which may have adverse effects on their health, due to hazards of work [10]. Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) focuses primarily on protecting employees in the workplace from accidents, injuries, and exposure to harmful substances. While accidents can happen at any time, it is still the employer's responsibility to ensure that they take steps to reduce the risk of incidents and maintain a safe working environment [11].

Occupational health and safety (OHS) is critical in creating a safe, healthy, and productive work environment. It encompasses policies, procedures, and practices designed to prevent workplace injuries, illnesses, and fatalities while promoting employees' overall well-being. The importance of OHS extends beyond mere compliance with legal requirements; it plays a significant role in fostering sustainable development within organizations and communities.

### **Key Reasons Highlighting the Importance of OHS:**

1. **Protection of Employees:**OHS ensures that workers are shielded from workplace hazards such as physical injuries, exposure to harmful chemicals, and psychological stress. This protection not only preserves life but also enhances the quality of work life for employees.
2. **Increased Productivity:**A safe and healthy work environment boosts employee morale and reduces absenteeism caused by illnesses or injuries. This leads to higher productivity and efficiency, which directly benefits organizational performance.
3. **Legal Compliance:**Adhering to OHS regulations helps organizations avoid legal penalties, financial losses, and reputational damage. Compliance demonstrates a commitment to ethical business practices.
4. **Cost Savings:**Implementing effective OHS measures reduces the costs associated with workplace accidents, including medical expenses, compensation claims, and lost working hours.
5. **Enhanced Employee Retention and Engagement:**Employees are more likely to stay with and feel loyal to organizations that prioritize their health and safety. This improves workforce stability and helps attract top talent.
6. **Promotes a Culture of Safety:**Emphasizing OHS fosters a culture where safety is a shared responsibility. Employees at all levels become more vigilant, contributing to a proactive approach to hazard identification and prevention.
7. **Support for Public Health:**By reducing workplace-related illnesses and injuries, OHS contributes to public health initiatives and reduces the burden on healthcare systems.
8. **Business Continuity and Resilience:**OHS practices mitigate risks that could disrupt business operations, such as industrial accidents or health crises, ensuring continuity and resilience in the face of challenges.

Occupational health and safety are not just a legal or ethical responsibility; it is a cornerstone of sustainable business practices that benefit employees, organizations, and society.

### **Barriers to Implementing Effective Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) Programs**

Despite its importance, organizations face numerous challenges in implementing effective occupational health and safety (OHS) programs. These barriers often hinder the development and sustainability of safety initiatives, placing employees and organizational success at risk.

One significant barrier is the lack of management commitment. When leadership does not actively support or prioritize safety, OHS programs are often underfunded and poorly enforced. This lack of engagement signals to employees that safety is not a critical concern, leading to a disregard for safety measures. Similarly, inadequate training and awareness among workers and supervisors exacerbate the issue. Employees unfamiliar with safety protocols or unaware of their importance are more likely to unintentionally violate them, increasing the likelihood of accidents [12].

Resource constraints, both financial and human, also present a major challenge. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) may lack the funds to invest in advanced safety equipment, training programs, or specialized personnel. The absence of qualified safety professionals to design and oversee OHS measures further limits an organization's ability to implement comprehensive programs. Additionally, resistance to change is a frequent obstacle. Workers and managers alike may fear disruptions to established workflows or perceive safety measures as an unnecessary burden, making it difficult to introduce or enforce new policies [13].

Another barrier is the complexity of regulations governing OHS. Navigating intricate legal frameworks and keeping up with evolving compliance requirements can overwhelm organizations, especially those with limited expertise. Furthermore, workplace culture plays a critical role. A culture that prioritizes productivity over safety or tolerates risky practices undermines efforts to create a safe working environment. This is often compounded by communication gaps, where unclear expectations or delayed reporting of hazards prevent effective implementation of safety measures.

External factors, such as economic pressures or tight supply chain demands, can also deprioritize safety initiatives. During economic downturns, for example, organizations may redirect resources away from safety programs to address immediate operational needs. Additionally, workplaces with diverse teams may encounter cultural or language barriers, which complicate the communication of safety protocols [14].

Finally, psychological barriers such as fear of reporting safety concerns or incidents further hinder progress. Employees may worry about retaliation, stigma, or lack of confidentiality, discouraging them from participating in OHS programs.

Addressing these barriers requires a multifaceted approach. Organizations must foster strong leadership commitment, allocate sufficient resources, simplify regulatory compliance, and promote a positive safety culture. By

encouraging open communication and using data-driven systems to monitor safety performance, businesses can overcome these challenges and create safer, more productive work environments.

### Conclusion

Occupational health and safety (OHS) in the healthcare sector is indispensable for ensuring the protection, well-being, and productivity of workers. It plays a pivotal role in mitigating risks associated with biological, chemical, physical, and psychological hazards while promoting a culture of safety within healthcare institutions. Effective implementation of OHS measures not only protect workers from harm but also enhance the overall quality of healthcare services, contributing to resilient and sustainable health systems.

However, the challenge in implementing OHS programs, such as insufficient management commitment, financial and resource limitations, and resistance to change, highlights the need for targeted strategies. Leadership engagement, comprehensive training, resource allocation, and fostering a positive safety culture are critical to overcoming these barriers. Furthermore, simplifying regulatory compliance and addressing communication gaps can ensure more effective OHS integration in healthcare organizations.

Ultimately, by prioritizing occupational health and safety, healthcare institutions can create a safer and more supportive work environment, enhancing employee satisfaction and productivity while ensuring the delivery of high-quality care. This commitment is not only a legal and ethical responsibility but a strategic investment in the well-being of workers and the communities they serve.

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