

Work Related Health Problems In Pakistan An Ignored Area.

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Objective:

To evaluate the prevailing Occupational Health related issues in Pakistan, in the light of evidence based medicine.

Method:

The study is based on published information in local, international journals and in literature of occupational health related agencies. We have critically analyzed the prevailing occupational health situation in Pakistan.

Results:

There is alarming picture of occupational health in the country. Occupational lung diseases are very common among workers. Prevalence of Byssinosis was 32% in textile workers in Karachi. Lung functions were highly reduced in welding workers with longer exposures. In cement mill workers 14% were suffered from lung diseases.

A cohort of 208 welders was evaluated and 105 injuries were reported in 61 workers.

Noise level in three units of a polyester fiber plant was found higher than acceptable levels. Prevalence of hepatitis C and B was 6% and 2.4 % respectively found in health care workers. Water and power development authority had reported deaths of 82 workers in workplace accidents in year 2000. 3.3 million child workers work in highly dangerous conditions. In the cottage industries, workers under 18 years suffered from fatigue 51%, backache 30%. Numbness of fingers 27%, joint pains 23% and vertigo 17.14 %.

Discussion:

Pakistan is a developing country, with labor force of 42 million. Although there is dearth of scientific work, the published literature depicts deplorable situation of Occupational Health in Pakistan.

Ergonomic problems, work injuries, psychosocial issues, diseases due to physical, biological and chemical agents were well identified.

In Pakistan labor laws (Factories act 1934 and Mines act 1923) are outdated and do not cover many working sectors, as agricultural, construction, Health care, fishing and informal sectors, thus majority of the workers are not covered by the law.

Furthermore Occupational Exposure Limits are not mentioned in the above laws. Most importantly education and training in occupational health is neglected in Pakistan.

Labor laws need constantly updated and properly implemented.

The pathetic situation of Occupational Health in Pakistan calls for immediate attention on the part of Government, UN agencies like WHO and ILO and International Organizations working for health of workers.

