

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to describe the health hazards, welfare facilities and health related practices in small scale factories and to identify the workers' health problems.

A descriptive cross sectional study design was used. The study was conducted in MOH area Kotte. The entire population of factories with less than 50 workers in the area was selected for the study. There were a total of 82 factories with a total workforce of 645. The sample of workers was selected by stratified random sampling according to the number of workers per factory. The sample size calculated was 267 workers.

Data collection was done using an observation schedule to assess the health hazards and welfare facilities in the factories. An interviewer administered questionnaire was administered to the factory management to identify the health related practices in the factories. The workers' health problems were identified using an interviewer administered questionnaire.

Garments, printing, bakeries, production of other food items and vehicle repair centres were the commonest industries. Out of the total workforce, 44% were temporary employees. The workers were exposed to multiple health hazards in the workplaces. The commonest hazards identified were excessive noise (80%), electrical hazards (88%), poor house keeping (90%), poor cleanliness (57%), unguarded machinery (73%) and ergonomic hazards (70%). Chemical safety was also found to be poor in a majority of factories using chemicals.

Welfare facilities like sanitary conveniences (94%), drinking water (84%) and washing facilities (99%) were available in most factories but they were unclean and poorly maintained in a majority of them. On the other hand, availability and adequacy of dining rooms, rest rooms and first aid facilities were extremely poor.

Safety was given a very low priority in these factories and none of them had a person responsible for safety. Only 25% of factories trained the workers on safe use of machinery. Welders' eye guards were the only personal protective device provided in these factories although the workers were exposed to multiple hazards. Provision of health services was limited to taking the patient to the hospital in an emergency. Only 10% of the factory managers were aware of the accident notification system and almost all the factories did not comply with it.

The commonest health problems identified were musculoskeletal problems (18%), respiratory conditions (10.5%), Skin rashes (6%) and eye problems (3%). An annual accident rate of 146 per 1000 workers was reported.

The occupational health status of small scale factory workers was found to be highly unsatisfactory with exposure to multiple hazards and poor welfare facilities. Very small factories (with ten or less workers) were found to be worse in this respect. The coordinated action of labour authorities, primary health care team and the factory management is recommended to improve this situation.