PERCEPTIONS AND PRACTICES OF WORKPLACE SAFETY AND HEALTH AMONG STAR RATED HOTELS IN KOTA KINABALU

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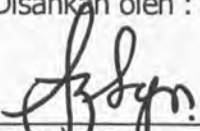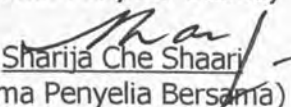
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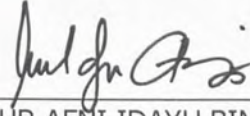
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ABSTRACT

PERCEPTIONS AND PRACTICES OF WORKPLACE SAFETY AND HEALTH AMONG STAR RATED HOTELS IN KOTA KINABALU

Occupational safety and health is a vital issue in the workplace as it is strongly related to human behaviour and belief towards safety. Although hotels may seem to be a low risk workplace, accidents have occurred due to lack of safety awareness. The Malaysian Social Security Organisation (SOCSO) reported more than 500 cases every year from 2006 to 2008. The number of reported cases became higher in 2009 with a total of 1,164 injuries. This study aims to find out the perceptions and the reality of safety and health practices among hotel staff. A reciprocal theoretical framework has been drawn which is underpinned by Safety Triad Theory. A qualitative research using one-to-one interviews for data collection was conducted with 29 respondents comprising of staff from hotels ranging from 1 to 5-star. Each interview was transcribed, re-read and analysed by thematic analysis. Findings reveal that the majority of respondents feel safe when working in the hotels. Yet, a number of them admit to experiencing some form of stress due to rude guests and excessive workload. Some of them were afraid of machinery hazards in the kitchen while others were very concerned about physical illnesses. A few of them shared their anxiety on guests' items stolen and were worried about being treated with violence. Study shows that most of the hotels' staff in 3 to 5-star hotels are aware of the significance of workplace safety and health and emphasise was giving on safety practices. In contrast, it is an issue taken lightly by 1 and 2-star hotels' staff due to lack of safety concern and practices. Findings also showed many challenges such as staff behaviour towards safety, the absence of qualified staff in the safety field, lack of safety communication, and expensive cost of safety training, all of which have inclined the improvement of safety perceptions and practices. This study provides an insight on workplace safety and health among selected hotels' staff which can also serve to assist hotel management in improving and re-generating safety job performance among their staff. This study had been limited by the hotels' policy where the researcher had been prohibited to spend more time with the respondents.

Keywords :   Workplace safety and health, perceptions and practices, hotel, qualitative study

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ABSTRAK

Keselamatan dan kesihatan pekerjaan merupakan suatu isu yang penting di sesebuah tempat kerja kerana ia sangat berkait-rapat dengan kelakuan dan kepercayaan manusia terhadap keselamatan. Meskipun hotel dianggap sebagai tempat kerja berisiko rendah, namun kemalangan telah berlaku disebabkan kurangnya kesedaran tentang keselamatan. Pertubuhan Keselamatan Sosial (PERKESO) Malaysia telah melaporkan lebih daripada 500 kes pada setiap tahun dari 2006 hingga 2008. Jumlah kes yang telah dilaporkan semakin meningkat kepada 1,164 pada tahun 2009. Kajian ini adalah bertujuan untuk mengkaji persepsi dan amalan keselamatan dan kesihatan secara realitinya di kalangan pekerja hotel. Satu rangka kajian telah dilakar dan disokong oleh Teori Percubaan Keselamatan. Kajian kualitatif dengan menggunakan kaedah temubual seorang demi seorang sebagai pengumpulan data telah dilakukan terhadap 29 orang responden serta melibatkan hotel kategori 1 hingga 5-bintang. Setiap temubual telah ditranskrip, dibaca berulang kali dan dianalisa dengan menganalisis tema. Keputusan telah mendapati majoriti responden merasakan bahawa bekerja di hotel adalah selamat. Sungguhpun begitu, masih ada segelintir di kalangan responden mengaku mengalami tekanan disebabkan oleh tetamu yang kurang sopan dan beban kerja yang berlebihan. Beberapa orang di kalangan mereka meluahkan kebimbangan terhadap sumber risiko mesin yang ada di dapur, manakala yang lainnya ada pula menceritakan tentang penyakit pekerjaan. Terdapat juga yang berkongsikan kerisauan mereka terhadap kecurian barang-barang tetamu di bilik dan juga dilayan dengan buruk. Kajian menunjukkan kebanyakan pekerja di hotel 3 hingga 5-bintang sedar akan kepentingan keselamatan dan kesihatan di tempat kerja dan memberi penekanan terhadap amalan keselamatan. Sebaliknya, isu ini diambil ringan di kalangan pekerja hotel 1 dan 2-bintang disebabkan kurangnya perhatian terhadap isu dan amalan keselamatan. Hasil dapatan telah menunjukkan sebahagian besar cabaran seperti kelakuan pekerja ke arah keselamatan, tiada pekerja yang berkelayakan dalam bidang keselamatan, kekurangan komunikasi keselamatan dan kos latihan keselamatan yang mahal, kesemuanya cenderung untuk menambahbaik tanggapan dan amalan keselamatan dan kesihatan pekerjaan. Kajian ini menyediakan kefahaman sebenar tentang keselamatan dan kesihatan pekerjaan di kalangan pekerja hotel yang telah terpiih dan turut dapat membantu pihak pengurusan hotel dalam usaha meningkatkan dan menghidupkan kembali amalan keselamatan ketika bekerja di kalangan pekerja mereka. Kajian ini telah mengalami kekangan dengan polisi hotel yang melarang penyelidik untuk meluangkan masa yang lebih lama dengan responden.

Kata kunci : Keselamatan dan kesihatan pekerjaan, anggapan dan amalan, hotel, kajian kualitatif

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LIST OF ABBREVIATION

CPR	Cardio Pulmonary Resuscitation
DOSH	Department of Safety and Health
HRD	Human Resource Department
HRM	Human Resource Management
NADOOPOD	Notification of Accident, Dangerous Occurrence, Occupational Poisoning and Occupational Disease
NIOSH	National Institute of Safety and Health
OSHA 1994	Occupational Safety and Health Act 1994
PPE	Personal Protection Equipment
SOCSO	Social Security Organization
SOP	Standard Operating Procedures

LIST OF APPENDIX

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LIST OF PUBLICATION

Nur Afni Idayu Aziz, Chan, J. K. L. and Sharija Che Shaari. 2010. Views of selected hotels' personnel on the practices of occupational safety and health training in hotel industry. *Paper presented at the International Graduate Tourism Research Conference.* Organised by the Universiti Sains Malaysia and Berjaya University College of Hospitality, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia on 16-17 April.

Nur Afni Idayu Aziz, Sharija Che Shaari and Chan, J. K. L. 2011. Managing safety and health in selected hotels in Kota Kinabalu : The Occupational Safety and Health Perspective. *Paper presented at the International Management Conference.* Organised by the Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin, Kuala Terengganu, Terengganu, Malaysia on 16-17 April.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

This chapter presents on background of the study by describing the need of safety awareness and practices in a variety of workplace context. The next section highlights research problem statement in order to determine research gaps which must be fulfilled. This is followed by purpose of the study within three research objectives. Then it clarifies the main research question and three associated sub-research questions to help the researcher achieves the research objectives. The final section states the rationale and scope of the study.

1.1 Background of the Study

Issues on work-related accidents are not new. Work-related accidents may happen in any industry and in a varying degree of seriousness regardless of the type of industry (Maguire, 2006). For instance, negligence on safety practices have resulted in rail track workers fatalities in the rail industry towards the end of the 1990s in the United Kingdom (Baldry and Ellison, 2006). Another incident, which was a wildfire, was the result of a short circuit at the MGM Grand Hotel in Las Vegas due to improper wiring installation (Best, 1982). Although the service sector is a relatively low risk industry compared to the manufacturing and construction industries, accidents at the workplace is nevertheless a growing issue and should not be sidelined (Smallman, 2001). Previous studies indicate that accidents are not only specific to higher risk industries but may occur in any industry as it is interrelated to management negligence, human error or system failure in the workplace (Govekar and Govekar, 2006; Best, 1982; Baldry and Ellison, 2006).

Floriano and Gonzalez (2007) considered that organisation and management must understand how their workers perceived risks in determining safety needs at the workplace. This is significant to educate all workers predicting the risks in appropriate ways.

Therefore, obtaining workplace safety and health perceptions among hotel staff is necessary in order to identify safety and health practices. Hence, it is important to understand the implementation of safety and health practices in hotel operations.

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) (2010) stated that more than two million people died due to occupational accidents or work-related diseases every year. A total of USD270 million occupational accidents and USD160 million cases of occupational disease have been paid for workers' compensation. Based on international statistics, the United States pays close to USD 110 billion annually for workers' compensation (Vredenburgh, 2002). Lack of training safety measures and failure to protect workers with accident mitigation had resulted in 146 fatalities in a fire on 25 March 1911 and was the worst industrial accident in the US (Govekar and Govekar, 2006). Focusing on Malaysia, a total of RM760 million in compensation has been paid in 2004 (Berita Harian, 2004) and RM889 million in 2008 (BERNAMA, 2010) by the Social Security Organisation (SOCSO).

In Malaysia, there were 2,095 organisations in hotel industry in 2006 compared to 2,068 organisations registered in 2005 (Ringkasan Penemuan 2008, 2009). In 2006, the hotel industry was announced as the highest contributor with a figure of RM7.2 billion in national gross output. In terms of workforce, the hotel industry had employed 99, 650 workers in 2006. Figure 1.1 shows the total number of occupational injuries and illnesses in the accommodation sector.

Figure 1.1 :   The Total Number of Occupational Injuries and Illnesses Cases in the Accommodation Sector
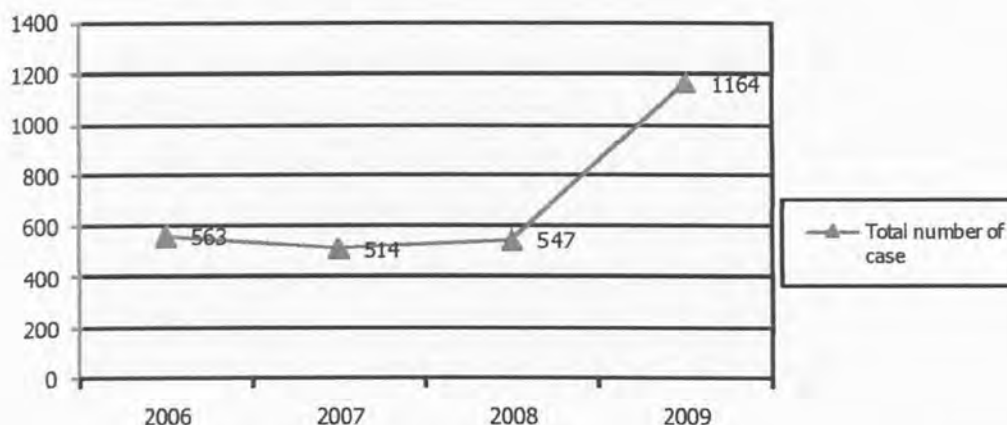
In light of this, it is observed that more than 500 cases had been reported every year from 2006 to 2008 in the accommodation sector. Referring to the above chart, it is found that the occupational injuries and illnesses cases were slowly declined between 2006 and 2007 as to 8.7 percent. Nevertheless, between year 2007 and 2008, it is seemingly slightly increased to 6.4 percent. Then, the pattern of this phenomenon became worsen as the total number of cases was at its highest when it was suddenly increased steeply to 1,164 in 2009 (Annual Report, 2006; 2007; 2008; 2009) which the latest rate has increased to 53 percent. Hence, it is important to take notes whereby the actual number of those cases could be higher as the figures do not include unreported cases by employers. Furthermore, the workplace injuries and illnesses were briefly reported without specific types of incident and reasons instead of distinguishing as associated with machinery handling, slips and falls, hearing losses and respiratory problems. In summary, the workplace injuries and illnesses have risen in accommodation sector and still remain high at 1,164 cases in 2009. Although the hotel industry has been marked as a lower risk industry compared to higher risk industries, there has been a lack of studies to prove that hotel operations are safe.

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In the context of hotel workplace, it is important to emphasise that accidents may occur in various types and resulted from a number source of risks as explained in Chapter Two. For instance, a part of that is being highlighted in the previous studies, the occupational injuries and illnesses which experienced among the operational staff especially in Housekeeping and Front Desk areas including work-related stress because of the nature work (Faulkner and Patiar, 1997), musculoskeletal disorder because of highly physical demands (Pekkarinen and Anttonen, 1988; Sherehiy *et al.*, 2006 and UNITEHERE, 2006) and chemical burns (Bohle and Quinlan, 2000; Goetsch, 2008; Occupational Safety and Health Guidelines for Hotel Industry, 2003; Velazquez *et al.*, 2006). Additionally, a large number of staff and non-staff in a hotel are also exposed to fire accidents as in an example by following the MGM hotel incident in Las Vegas (Best, 1982).

A number of studies have successful identified a number of potential hazards and dangerous occurrences in hotels. For instance, Faulkner and Patiar (1997) found operational areas staffs are exposed to work stress because of the nature of their work (monotonous type, heavy work load and physically demanding). Pekkarinen and Anttonen (1988) found that kitchen staffs have been medically proven to be suffering from musculoskeletal illness (back, neck and shoulder pain) because of unsafe behaviour, practices and workplace conditions. Therefore, it is obvious indicate that workplace hazards can be found in varying types and source even in the low skills sector.

In general, safety practices are related to human desire to act safely based on their understanding of safety and health knowledge as well as safety skills enhancement by doing regular training. Likewise, safety practices at the workplace include the use of protective equipment such as hand gloves, half-face masks and goggles; material manual handling such as handling, pushing, pulling, lifting and carrying procedures by involving body postures; personal hygiene; the use of right tools and equipment for the job, proper storage of tools and equipment; communication on safety and health issues and compliance with safety rules and regulations (Kaila, 2008; Sari, 2009; Che Hassan *et al.*, 2007). These have been pointed out by the Occupational Safety and Health Act 1994 which are applied throughout Malaysia to all industries as specified in the First Schedule of Guidelines

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on Occupational Safety and Health Act 1994 (Act 514) (refer to Appendix A). This Act gives mandate to all employers to provide a safe workplace for their employees as far as it is practicable to ensure a safety work environment for their employees and non-employees (Occupational Safety and Health Act 1994).

Generally in an organisation, the function of the Human Resource Department (HRD) is to attract, develop and sustain an effective workforce (Baum, 2006). As such, the HRD is responsible for achieving organisation goals when it comes to workforce (Armstrong, 2007). Thus, it is of utmost importance to strengthen the skills and knowledge of employees in order to maintain the effectiveness of an organisation. (Sari, 2009). Furthermore, it is the role of HDR to educate managers and staff on occupational safety and health in order to develop an effective workforce and ensure the achievement of the organisation's goals. However, as pointed out by Tranter (2002) it is a challenge for the human resource management to develop a systematic approach in minimizing risks in safety and health at the workplace.

Insufficient safety training and negligence on the part of employees, failure on the part of the management to prevent accidents, failure to comply with safety policies or procedures and lack of legislation enforcement are potential causes of accidents at the workplace (Page and Meyer, 1996). Thus, enhancing safety practices at the workplace is the key to ensure a safe workplace environment (Abdullah *et al.*, 2009). Survey of Health and Safety Climate in Hong Kong Hotel Industry (1998) and Hotel Housekeeping survey by Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety (2009) found that poor safety and health awareness as well as lack of training are the major causes that lead to injuries and illnesses at the workplace. It is essence to describe the level of self-awareness towards safety and health in the workplace. In addition to that, it is also vital to understand how hotel staffs view occupational safety and health issues as Mbakaya *et al.* (1999) highlighted encouraging safety awareness should be created as it is considered as a preventive strategy. This is supported by Hong Kong Occupational Safety and Health Council (1998) which stated that the management should enhance communication within an organisation to let the staff understand the organisation's commitments, beliefs and attitude towards health and safety whilst

also providing safety training and education. Thus, the perceptions of workers on risks and dangers cannot be overlooked (Floriano and Gonzalez, 2007). Consequently, the perceptions of staffs towards safety and health are important in order to create a better condition at the workplace.

To that end, it is reasonable to consider Guldenmund (2000) suggestions whereby more research should be conducted to assess an organisation's basic or rooted assumptions in order to gain a deeper understanding of their staff's working style. This is crucial to be investigated as the previous studies tend to measure the number of accidents and determine their causes rather than describe the workers' understanding of workplace safety and health awareness and practices (Arezes and Miguel, 2008). More attention should be given as the difficulties are more apparent in lower risk industries because of lack of understanding particularly in risk perceptions (Makin and Winder, 2008).

1.2   Problem Statement

Fatal and non-fatal work related accidents and compensation are increasing from year to year. This phenomenon is very costly as reflected in the direct and indirect costs for both the organisation and the employees (Beus *et al.*, 2010). A growing number of studies in safety culture have been conducted in various complex and high-risk industry sectors such as energy, chemical, transportation, construction (Saurin *et al.*, 2005) and manufacturing (Velazquez *et al.*, 2006; Flin *et al.*, 2000). Nevertheless, there is a lack of studies in lower risk industries notably in hotels. Moreover, there is still a lack of information concerning workers' perceptions on workplace safety and health (Leoni, 2010). There is limited understanding of occupational safety and health practices in hotels. In addition, questions arise as how hotel staffs perceive workplace safety and health in the hotels since the total number of occupational injuries and illnesses has increased drastically. More importantly, it remains unclear on the investigation of Malaysian hotel industry especially from the view of the staff.

1.3   Objectives of the Study

The study aims to understand and describe the perceptions and practices of workplace safety and health in the hotel industry. For this purpose, the objectives of this study are as follows:

   i.   to describe the perceptions of safety and health at the workplace among hotel staff
   ii. to describe the extent to which safety and health elements being practiced in the hotels
   iii. to identify the types of safety training programmes that have been conducted in hotels
   iv. to identify the challenges faced by the hotel management in providing safety and health training to their staff

1.4   Research Questions

In order to achieve the research objectives, the main research question of this study is; to what extent hotel staffs understand on the subject of the occupational safety and health? The associated sub-research questions are as follows:

   i.What are the perceptions of workplace safety and health among hotel staff?
   ii.To what extent are safety practices being implemented by hotel staffs?
   iii.What kinds of safety training programmes have been conducted?
   iv.What kind of challenges faced in providing safety and health training to hotel staff?

1.5   Rationale of the Study

Perception or understanding of workplace hazard is an important preventive determination to be considered by an employee to avoid accidents (Holmes *et al.*, 1998). It becomes complicated when most of small business employers have the tendency to think that risk control is the sole responsibility of individual employees rather than a responsibility shared with the employer (Huang *et al.*, 2011). Poor safety management in the workplace can lead to poor safety awareness or perceptions (Chen and Yang, 2004).

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Consequently, it can lead to a series of unsafe acts or unsafe behaviour while working, eventually contributing to accidents, injuries or disasters. The effect may not only be extremely costly in financial terms but may also tarnish the organisation's good reputation and may even cost human lives. (Postlethwaite *et al.*, 2009).

1.6   Scope of the Study

This study seeks to conduct an in-depth understanding of workplace safety and health perceptions and practices within the hotel workplace context. 'Perceptions' covers the understanding and belief of hotel staff and views of their experiences in the workplace safety and health. In order to provide an insight on their perceptions, the following categories such as job tasks and demands, the working environment, safety knowledge, the types of safety training they have received, as well as their experiences in occupational injuries and illnesses have to be described. These categories are taken out from the related previous studies. These are the elements underlying the theoretical framework in this study and have been adapted from the Safety Triad Theory. Meanwhile, the word 'practices' comprises of any acts or behaviour (safe and at risk) in their routine during work at their workplaces. This study is also in compliance with the OSHA 1994 requirements; the duties of employers and employees towards workplace safety and health. It also includes in-depth interviews with 29 respondents of one to five-star hotels in downtown Kota Kinabalu. To enhance the credibility of data, the data sources of the interviews have been crossed-checked with the workplace observation field notes and photos. Besides that, this study involves the researcher's connection as the primary instrument along data collection and analysis. All interview transcripts have been reviewed and verified by each respondent as the credibility of data.

1.7   Chapter Conclusion

This chapter presents the research background, the scope and importance of the study. It attempts to provide an insight on the beliefs and behaviour on safety and health as well as the challenges faced in the safety of the work culture within the hotel industry. It also emphasises on the crucial roles of human resource management and enforcement of OSHA 1994 as the driving force responsible in shaping the perceptions and practices of workplace safety and health amongst the

hotel staffs. The next chapter discusses about the occupational safety and health aspects which includes different hazards involved in hotel workplace, how accident occurs and responsibilities for a workplace safety and health.

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