OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY, HEALTH CONDITIONS AND PRODUCTIVITY OF FACULTY IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS AT THE NATIONAL CAPITAL REGION, PHILIPPINES: AN ASSESSMENT

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ABSTRACT

The study looked into the health and safety conditions of the faculty in selected higher education institutions (HEI’s) at the National Capital Region (NCR) and related them to their productivity. Health and safety conditions included work environment, housekeeping, and health and medical services provided by the concerned institutions to their faculty. Productivity, on the other hand, consisted of outputs in instructions, research, community and extension services, and creative productions. The different occupational and non-occupational illnesses were taken into consideration. Afterwards, provisions on occupational safety and health for faculty productivity were proposed by the researchers to help school administrators in maintaining a safe and healthful atmosphere in the academe, thereby increasing the productivity of the faculty.

Keywords: health and safety, higher education institutions (HEI’s), productivity, occupational safety

Introduction

Health is oftentimes said as wealth. The World Health Organization in 1984 further defined health as “a resource for everyday life ... a positive concept emphasizing social and personal resources, as well as physical capabilities.” Health is the extent to which an individual or group is able on the one hand, to realize aspirations and satisfy needs; and, on the other hand, to change or cope with the environment (WHO, 2004). Thus, good health enables one to function independently within a changing environment. It is in this premise that some businessmen learn to follow the principle of safety and health first before profits. This is considered as the humanitarianism of business. Preserving human life is an objective which requires no explanation. In fact, Sison (2003) wrote that waste of human resources caused by industrial accidents and
occupational illness can be prevented, minimized or eliminated through the safety and health programs and policies of the company or agency.

Maintaining the safety and health of the employees should be the task of management. It is believed that a healthy employee works more efficiently, is more productive and possesses a better work attitude than a sickly one. This in turn increases the productivity and profitability of the company.

Over the past few decades, laws and regulations have been instituted by the government for the protection of industrial workers. The Philippine Constitution, for example, has included provisions on the protection and promotion of the welfare of the workers. The Labor Code of the Philippines also provides for workers’ safety and health and required the then Ministry of Labor and Employment to promulgate the Occupational Safety and Health Standards for Business and Industry. Lastly, even the Magna Carta for Public School Teachers indicates in its policy the importance of promoting and improving the social and economic status of public teachers including their living and working conditions. These provisions constitute the bulk of the policies and programs on safety and health of the employees in different companies in the Philippines.

Implementing safety and health policies in the workplace should not only be confined to industries but should also be taken into consideration by educational institutions, specifically the state higher education institutions. It is high time that HEIs give these policies considerable attention due to the environment that we now have and the prevailing lifestyle of the people.

Teachers play an important role in the educational process. Their effectiveness in teaching constitutes much in the acquisition of knowledge, the development of skill, and the enhancement of the talents of the students under their supervision. However, when teachers are ill they cannot guide and direct the needs of students toward the development of their attitudes and appreciation of learning. Moreover, their relationship with their colleagues and superiors in the school are affected (Llanos, 2006).

Truly, the maintenance of a healthy workplace is necessary for securing the health and safety of the teachers for the efficient and effective delivery of service. The teaching profession in the Philippines needs great concern among school officials and educators while acknowledging the fact that all professions have their own challenges and sources of occupational illnesses. The rapid and profound changes in many aspects of the education in our society warrant a closer look at occupational safety and health of teachers in our country.

Teachers are faced with the task of the daily preparation of lessons, the routine of classroom management, the application of continuous revisions of curriculum, the utilization of information and communications technology (ICT), and the finding of time to fulfill their social needs. These may result in their feelings of exhaustion, depression, irritability, and illness. Moreover, confronted with the problems in the school setting such as large classes, minimum resources, vague rules and regulations, poor working
conditions and lack of clarity as to the duties of teachers may result in turnovers, absenteeism, and teacher dissatisfaction.

The teachers are not exempted from the above-mentioned conditions. Their day-to-day activities also cause stress and anxiety, thus, their productivity is affected. Productivity among teachers is, however, described comprehensively in the National Budget Circular No. 461 (1998) by the four areas of teachers’ functions in the state universities and colleges, namely, instruction, research, extension and community services, and production.

With the vision to bring occupational safety and health to a level of sophistication equal to if not better than that found in the industrialized nations the study took was conducted to hopefully contribute, even minimally, to the attainment of the lofty goal for occupational safety and health in the country, specifically in the academe.

**Objectives**

The research looked into the health and safety conditions of the faculty in selected higher education institutions (HEIs) at the National Capital Region (NCR) and related them to their productivity. Health and safety conditions included work environment, housekeeping, and health and medical services provided by the concerned institutions to their faculty. Productivity consisted of outputs in instructions, research, community and extension services, and creative productions. The researchers attempted to answer the following questions: 1) What is the health status of the faculty in terms of occupational and non-occupational illnesses? 2) How do the faculties assess the occupational safety and health conditions in their respective institutions? 3) What are the levels of productivity of the respondents in terms of four areas of teachers’ functions as to: instruction, research, community and extension services, and creative production? 4) What is the extent of relationship between occupational safety and health conditions and productivity of the faculty? 5) Based on the findings, what provisions on occupational safety and health standards could be proposed?

**Methodology**

The descriptive method of research was utilized. Two hundred and fifty-eight (258) faculty members in four (4) state HEIs in the National Capital Region were selected using non-probability quota sampling technique.
As shown in Figure 1, the input data of the study included safety and health for every employed Filipino citizen based on the Constitution, The Labor Code of the Philippines, Civil Service Rule on Safety and Health as provided by its Memorandum Circular No. 17 s. 1985, and the Occupational Safety and Health Standards on areas: work environment, housekeeping, and health and medical services (physical and mental). They formed the bases of the assessment. Occupational and non-occupational illnesses as well as the productivity in terms of the four areas of teachers’ functions in state universities and colleges, namely, instruction, research, community and extension services and intellectual production also formed parts of the input data. Questionnaires were administered to the faculty respondents. Interviews and observations were also conducted to validate findings.

Statistical treatments of data included percentages in presenting the proportions of representations of faculty members in the sample, weighted mean in presenting the manifestation levels of occupational and non-occupational illnesses of the faculty, their occupational safety and health conditions, and their productivity levels in instructions, research, community and extension services, and creative
productions. A 4-point scale (1 = not manifested; 2 = seldom manifested; 3 = manifested; 4 = highly manifested) was used to indicate level of illness or the indicators used and a rating scale was used to interpret the weighted means i.e., 3.50–4.00 = highly manifested; 2.50–3.49 = manifested; 1.50–2.49 = seldom manifested; 1.00–1.49 = not manifested. In establishing the relationship between health and safety conditions and faculty productivity, the Gamma correlation was used.

More than half of the 258 respondents are female (52.71%), married (60.47%) and belonged to the age group 40-59 years (51.16%). The greatest proportion had master’s degree (26.74%) and had been teaching from 6-10 years (20.16%).

Results and Discussion

**Health status of the faculty in terms of occupational and non-occupational illnesses**

The maintenance of a healthy workforce is a concern of all organizations including educational institutions. They are duty-bound to keep their employees/faculty members free from illnesses that will hinder better delivery of service to their clientele. Six out of the 23 listed occupational illnesses (26%) were manifested by the teachers from the four HEIs. Tiredness, fatigue, eyestrain, voice disorder, headache and exhaustion were the commonly “manifested” occupational illnesses. Low back pain, shoulder pain, neck pain, colds, sleep problems, anxiety, sinusitis, migraine, dizziness, sadness or depression, varicose veins, allergy, pharyngitis or laryngitis and asthma were “seldom manifested”. It can be deduced that the work-related illnesses are, to some extent, prevalent among teachers of state higher education institutions. Four out of five or majority of the listed non-occupational illnesses were “not manifested” at all except for hypertension which was “seldom manifested”.

**Faculty assessment of the occupational safety and health conditions in their respective institutions**

Employees’ safety and health are important not only in their own rights, but also they can affect personnel/human resource outcomes such as performance and attendance. The employees, therefore, should feel that they are safe and secure in their workplace and that they are free from health hazards like exposure to stressful workload because stress, affects their mental and physical health (Sanchez and Berin, 2002).

Regarding occupational safety and health conditions of the teachers’ workplace, all variables were manifested as shown by the obtained average weighted mean for appropriateness of painting and lighting (2.89), adequacy of passageways and exits (2.85), appropriateness of temperature and well ventilation (2.55), adequacy and proper laying out of seats, tables and chairs (2.52). The work environment of these institutions also got an average weighted mean of 2.70 (manifested). Results showed that the selected educational institutions have favorable workplaces for teachers.

The HEI’s showed varying levels of adequacy in facilities and supplies in its workplace. One HEI had the best work environment in terms of facilities and supplies as compared to the other three HEI’s. However, facilities for safety and security especially
of the differently-abled faculty in all were inadequate, falling short of the minimum requirements for accessibility as well as the enhancement of the mobility of the disabled persons. The inadequacy of designated smoking area in the workplace was attributed to compliance to a national memorandum prohibiting smoking in the campus (CHED Memo No. 56, S. 1998).

In terms of housekeeping, two HEIs had cleaner and more orderly workplaces and also provided sufficient health and medical services to their teachers as compared to the other two state schools. However, “garbage segregation and collection and zero-waste management” in the above-mentioned institutions were still inadequate. While some of the health and medical services are adequately provided, still others that are lacking were the “promotion of personal health maintenance, physical fitness and proper nutrition”, “occupational health personnel assigned to teachers”, “safety and health committee”, “protection for teachers against health hazards”, “calamity drills such as fire drills, earthquake drills, bomb threats”, “seminars and trainings for teachers in safe work habits”, and “procedures and provision of guidance and counseling information”. Overall the work environment and housekeeping of the said state HEI’s were adequate (composite weighted mean of 2.56 and 2.62 respectively) but insufficient in health and medical services (weighted mean of 2.48).

**Levels of productivity in terms of teachers’ functions in the areas of instruction, research, community and extension services, and creative production**

Work productivity of teachers in terms of instruction is vital in upholding quality education in the state higher education institutions as expected of them. It includes their commitment to the teaching profession, knowledge of the subject matter, teaching strategies for independent learning as well as the management of learning. It is likewise vital to generate research outputs which include inventions, discoveries, various creative works, and innovations in different fields of endeavors. Teachers in the HEI’s are also expected to render community and extension services like literacy enhancements, establishment of livelihood programs, clean and green projects, cooperative development, vocational training programs, calamity relief activities, and sponsorship of sports activities. Productivity can also be measured in terms of production of academic works and/or instructional materials in the forms of published books, monographs, articles, instructional manuals, modules, workbooks, films, and compositions.

The productivity of the teachers of state higher education institutions got an overall weighted of 2.59 (productive). The average weighted mean of instruction was 3.28 (highly manifested), for research 2.26 (barely productive), for community and extension services 2.51 (productive), and for intellectual production 2.31 (barely productive). These results reveal that the teachers of the four state schools were very competent in instruction, magnanimous in community and extension services but remains thriving in research and intellectual production. In general the respondents were still effective and efficient teachers.
**Relationship between occupational safety and health conditions and productivity of the faculty**

The gamma coefficient between safety and health conditions of government-owned schools and the productivity of their teachers in instruction was 0.329; the coefficient between safety and health conditions and productivity in research was 0.343; between safety and health conditions and productivity in community and extension services was 0.313; and between safety and health conditions and intellectual production was 0.185. The coefficient between safety and health conditions of schools and the overall productivity of the teachers was 0.379. These statistics showed positive but moderately small correlation between safety and health conditions of schools and the productivity of the teachers in instruction, research and community and extension services. These findings assert that safety and health conditions in these schools have direct association with the productivity of teachers in instruction, research, community and extension services and intellectual production. A safe and healthful work environment encourages teachers to be effective and efficient in the performance of their educational roles.

**Proposed provisions on occupational safety and health standards**

Each HEI must have policy statements on safety and health policies stipulated preferably in a manual to:

1. Ensure that the University/College has an effective safety and health program for faculty.
2. Ensure that the necessary resources are allocated to effectively administer and implement the program.
3. Establish/Appoint an Occupational Safety and Health Services (OSHS) Officer and Staff, Department Safety and Health Liaison (DSHL), and College Safety and Health Liaison (CSHL).
4. Include a review of the University/College safety and health program in at least one meeting with the Vice-Presidents, OSHS, DSHL, and CSHL each year.
5. Reinforce a positive safety and health culture in the campus.

The Occupational Safety and Health Services (OSHS) should provide technical support to assist the University/College Administration in developing and implementing a safety and health program and evaluating its effectiveness. The following shall the responsibilities of the OSHS:

1. Act as a University/College liaison with local and national regulatory agencies.
2. Review, together with the President, Vice-Presidents, and Deans the University/College safety and health programs once a year.
3. Recommend to the Administration the implementation of the Magna Carta for Public School Teachers provisions on giving free medical examination to teachers once a year as well as the payment of hazard pay to concerned teachers.
4. Keep those responsible for compliance informed of changes in safety and health regulations.
5. Provide the technical resources needed by the University/College to protect the safety and health of the faculty and other employees as well.
6. Make sure that the following are provided by the University/College:

- adequate dressing and locker rooms
- facilities for differently-abled faculty/employees
- control facilities and protective barriers for potential and actual hazards
- adequate firefighting equipments
- adequate emergency or danger signages and safety instructions such as NO SMOKING, NO LITTERING, WET FLOORS, SILENCE, etc.
- visible signages in the building premises like STOP, YIELD, DO NOT ENTER, etc.
- facilities for implementation of garbage segregation and zero waste management
- safe area for walking, exercise and other leisure
- exercises or recreational equipment and facilities
- facilities and other devices to enhance the mobility of the disabled/handicapped/differently-abled faculty/employee as provided for in the National Building Code of the Philippines.

7. Maintain the safety and health records necessary to document the University's programs and as required by specific regulations.

8. Keep a list of differently-abled faculty/employee in the campus who might need special attention in times of emergencies.

9. Develop a general evacuation plan in cases of emergencies.

The implementation of this health and safety policy advocacy will surely benefit the entire public tertiary educational institutions in the Philippines. Hence, it should warrant full support of the national government and other concerned agencies. The budget for this policy advocacy shall be ensured by the national government through the highest governing body of the concerned tertiary state university. It is highly imperative that all tertiary universities not only in the public sector shall be involved in carrying this out to the fullest.

Conclusions

1. Occupational illnesses were prevalent but the non-occupational illnesses were not pervasive among the faculty-respondents.

2. State HEIs in this study have favorable work environment despite some deficiency in facilities and supplies. By and large, these government–owned schools have favorable occupational safety and health conditions for teachers.

3. Faculty of state HEIs were very competent in instruction, magnanimous in community and extension services but still thriving in research and intellectual production.

4. A direct but reasonably small correlation exists between safety and health conditions of the concerned schools and the productivity of the teachers in instruction, research and community and extension services. The safety and health conditions of schools, on the contrary, have little association with the productivity of teachers in
intellectual production but have a direct, though moderately small, relationship with the overall productivity of teachers.

5. Provisions for occupational safety and health for faculty productivity were proposed by the researchers to help school administrators in maintaining a safe and healthful work environment in the academe.

Recommendations

The following are the recommendations of the researcher after exhaustively analyzing the findings and conclusions of the investigation:

1. Design a program for faculty that will create awareness on occupational and non-occupational illnesses. The objective of the program should be minimization, if not total eradication, of occupational and non-occupational illnesses among teachers in state higher education institutions.

2. The occupational safety and health conditions in these state higher education institutions should further be improved. Responsive development of the work environment and housekeeping should be unremittingly undertaken. Their facilities and supplies and health and medical services must be made adequately available and accessible. The installation of facilities and other devices for the enhancement of the mobility of the disabled/differently-abled faculty as provided for in the National Building Code of the Philippines must be considered by the concerned HEI's.

3. All state higher education institutions should strive to have occupational safety and health conditions very conducive to work and study. All state higher education institutions should design, construct and implement occupational safety and health development programs responsive to the needs and demands of their faculty. They can be benchmarked with the existing programs, projects and activities of Rizal Technological University, Technological University of the Philippines and other institutions with effective and efficient occupational safety and health programs for teachers. These occupational safety and health programs should be geared towards establishing a safe and healthful workplace for teachers.

4. Faculty of state higher education institutions should sustain their very impressive productivity in instruction. Their magnanimity for relevant community and extension services should be comparable to their productivity in instruction. The faculty should earnestly embark in research and intellectual production. They should demonstrate equal competences in instruction, research, community and extension services and intellectual production to be worthy of a responsive occupational safety and health development program. On the other hand, administrators of state higher education institutions should make the workplaces very conducive to uphold faculty productivity in instruction and community and extension services and motivate them to undertake quality research works and production of instructional materials.

5. Safety and health conditions in state higher education institutions should be continuously improved to increase the productivity of their faculty in instruction, research, community and extension services, and intellectual production. A sustainable
and responsive safety and health development program for their faculty should be created, designed, implemented, monitored and evaluated.

6. The proposed provisions for safety and health for faculty productivity in the cited educational institutions be endorsed and adopted by the school administrators to serve as their guide and enabling mechanism in maintaining a safe and healthful work environment that will greatly help in the delivery of quality services to their clientele.

7. The researchers recommend replication of this study by other researchers who might be inspired to embark on the same study involving part-time and temporary faculty of the same institutions as respondents and the use of age, gender and psychological aspects of health as variables.

References


