

ORIGINAL RESEARCH

Effects of Occupational Health and Safety on Healthy Lifestyle Behaviors of Workers Employed in a Private Company in Turkey

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Abstract

BACKGROUND It has been suggested that inappropriate working conditions and unsafe environments at construction sites, longer working hours, and inadequate workplaces adversely affect the health behaviors of workers.

OBJECTIVE The aim of this study was to evaluate the effect of occupational health and safety (OHS) practices on healthy lifestyle behaviors of workers employed at a construction site of a private company in Gaziantep, Turkey.

METHODS The sampling size of this descriptive study consisted of 400 employees working at the construction site between December 2014 and January 2015. In all, 341 employees still working or participating in the study during the period of this questionnaire study were included in the sampling. Data from the survey were derived from responses to questions regarding sociodemographic characteristics, OHS applications, health state, and working conditions, as well as to the questions in on the Healthy Lifestyle Behaviors Scale (HLBS), under direct surveillance.

FINDINGS Male workers with a mean age of 30.61 ± 8.68 years constituted the study population. Of the workers, 41.9% had a primary school education. The majority received professional and OHS training (65.7% and 79.2%, respectively). Although 83.9% reported using personal protective equipment (PPE), only 2.1% said they had experienced an occupational accident. Total mean score of HLBS scale was 116.91 ± 25.62 points. Workers who had positive thoughts about their jobs demonstrated healthy lifestyle behaviors ($P = .0001$). A positive direct correlation was detected between the training the workers received and the use of PPE ($P = .0001$). In all, 38.1% of the workers reported experiencing work stress at the time of the study. Mean HLBS scores of those experiencing work stress were lower than the scores for workers not experiencing stress ($P < .05$).

CONCLUSION Receiving OHS and professional training and using of PPE favorably affect healthy lifestyle behaviors.

KEY WORDS healthy lifestyle, occupational health and safety, workers, work stress

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INTRODUCTION

Healthiness is not only refraining from diseases, it is also physical, mental, and social well-being

according to the World Health Organization (WHO). Leading a healthy lifestyle decreases possibility of contracting a serious disease or risk for premature death. It is important to adopt healthy

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lifestyle behaviors in every phase of life, especially in workplaces where most of one's daily life is spent. Occupational health with a fundamental approach of preventive medicine is a field where activities aiming at definition of health problems and protection of workers' health during work life take place.^{1,2} According to the WHO, promoting healthy behaviors in the workplace creates a safe and healthy work environment; increases self-confidence, moral force, job satisfaction, and health protection skills; and decreases stress. For the company, properly managed health and safety programs are created with a favorable and attentive outlook. These programs can lead to increased productivity, while they decrease absenteeism, health expenditures, penalties, and a number of litigations.³

For the protection of health, beneficial and deleterious factors that affect health should be recognized. For the determination of the state of workers' health and to evaluate healthy behaviors, factors that affect the working environment as well as specific demographic characteristics (age, sex, health state, genetic disposition) should be considered.^{1,4}

Healthy behaviors and the factors that affect them were analyzed and inadequate activity levels, insufficient nutritional behaviors, increased use of tobacco products and alcohol consumption, and higher incidences of obesity were observed. As influential factors, sociodemographic characteristics such as advanced age, being divorced or single, and female gender were determined. Unfavorable working conditions such as longer working hours, type of occupation, lack of good physical workplace conditions, and unemployment were indicated as adverse factors on health behaviors.³ Although levels of healthy behaviors of the individuals employed in various lines of work demonstrate differences, the factors affecting health behaviors show similarities.³ Companies generally promote healthy living to their employees by means of decreasing health expenditures and increasing productivity. However, attitudes of workers concerning health and workplaces have not been evaluated.⁵

Most of the workers in one study reported that programs aimed at improving healthy lifestyle are valuable and that these kinds of programs would increase productivity and support their own healthy lifestyle behaviors.⁵ Workers who improve their own healthy lifestyle will decrease their health expenditures and, in all of these conditions, the workers will perform a key role.⁶ Workers who develop a healthy lifestyle are living less stressful lives and have less work-life balance problems. It

is important to take environmental factors into consideration by assessing the job satisfaction level of the workers annually, controlling health risks, and happy life to create a healthy culture. Programs should be continuously improved and workplace politics and a holistic atmosphere should be created to reinforce workers' health and implementation of many helpful comprehensive programs. Use of these kinds of programs and development of healthy lifestyle of workers will be a beneficial investment for employers and employees.^{5,7}

It has been indicated in the literature that in health improvement programs where workers have gained favorable behaviors concerning nutrition, physical activity, and smoking cessation, the employees lost weight, rates of regular physical activity and smoking cessation increased, whereas incidence of absenteeism decreased, leading to an increase in productivity.⁸ Knowledge about the health behaviors of workers and effective factors while planning improvement programs will increase success rates. At the same time, it will be possible to contribute favorably to the well-being, job satisfaction, and quality of life of the workers.^{9,10}

It has been suggested that inappropriate working conditions and unsafe environments at construction sites, longer working hours, and inadequate workplaces adversely affect the health behaviors of workers. Therefore, the aim of the present study was to evaluate the effect of occupational health and safety (OHS) practices on healthy lifestyle behaviors of workers employed at a construction site of a private company in Gaziantep, Turkey.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The sample size of this descriptive study consisted of 400 employees working at the construction site between December 2014 and January 2015. In all, 341 employees still working or participating in the study during the period of this questionnaire study were included in the sampling. Approvals from the Ethics Committee and the company were obtained. The surveys were distributed to the workers and conducted after giving them the preliminary information and obtaining their verbal consents in a room where they were together during hours of rest. Data from the study were derived from responses to questions regarding sociodemographic characteristics (age, sex, marital status, economic condition, and educational level), OHS applications (professional education, OHS training, use of personal protective equipment [PPE]), health state (nutrition,

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