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Factors affecting OHS practices in private universities: An empirical study from Bangladesh

Mohammad Alamgir Hossain [a,*], Md. Moazzem Hossain [b,1], Sheikh Tarannum [a,2], Tajmin Hossain Chowdhury [c,3]

[a] School of Business, North South University, Bashundhara, Dhaka 1229, Bangladesh
[b] School of Management and Governance, Murdoch University, 90 South Street, Perth, WA 6150, Australia
[c] Atomix System, House #16, Block #A, Bashundhara Avenue, Bashundhara, Dhaka 1229, Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT

Both production and service industries believe that occupational health and safety (OHS) practices are important for quality assurance of products/services. Unlike many other industries where production process and service receivers remain isolated, the production and consumption of university services are directly concomitant; quality of education is affected by OHS measures. An incident, due to lack of safety practices, in a university would have an adverse effect on nation's present and future. However, although have been examined in various industries, OHS research in academic institutes is comparatively limited. More specifically, the overall OHS status of the universities in developing countries is sufficient to shock any parent; similarly, research in this domain is rare. Reducing this literature gap, the current study takes an initiative that investigates the antecedents of OHS adoption in private universities in Bangladesh. Applying quantitative research method we used PLS-based structural equation modeling (SEM). The empirical results find that *regulatory pressure*, *top management commitment*, and *social factors* directly and positively influence university's intention to adopt OHS measures. Going further, *top management commitment* is reflected by *formal policy*, *formal training*, and *encouragement*. This research contributes significant knowledge to OHS literature while develop guidelines for the practitioners including government agencies, university management, and opinion leaders. We concluded with the limitation of the current study and promising a future research in this context.

1. Introduction

Quality of an organization is largely dependent on its people. In other words, the products or services offered by an organization reflect the quality of its people. A university, for instance, produce graduates. The quality of the graduates is significantly influenced by the quality of the lecturers, no doubt. But there are some supportive activities that actually contribute significantly to the production process, although indirectly; physical environment and infrastructure is one of the main – we use air-conditioned classrooms with multimedia facilities. Beyond anything, a safe school with sound infrastructure of buildings and facilities for safe work are pre-requisite for sustainable education system specifically, occupational health and safety (OHS) issues are crucial. Walton (1985) claims that safe workplace leads to better management of human resources by guaranteeing high performance. Brewer and Walker (2011) too assert that OHS in higher education has significant consequences on university quality assurance. In fact, OHS issues are now not considered as privilege anymore but are as the rights of the people of an organization (Islam and Jain, 2013). Similarly, it has been observed that OHS demonstrates an organization's responsibility to its employees and therefore became an integral part of corporate strategy (Montero et al., 2009). Moreover, in order to ensure most out of an organizational system managers realize that the people need to be safe, sound, and remain healthy (Zacharatos et al., 2005). Therefore, in general, it is formulated that OHS is similarly important for an organizations as well as for its employees (Walton, 1985; Whitener, 2001).

Since the revolution of the industrial workers securing their rights happened, employees acquired the right to work in a safe place – the formal rules of OHS have been evolved. Literature is

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +88 028852016x1788.
E-mail addresses: mahripon@yahoo.com (M.A. Hossain), M.Hossain@murdoch.edu.au (Md. Moazzem Hossain), sheikh.tarannum@gmail.com (S. Tarannum), tazmin_rumi@yahoo.com (T.H. Chowdhury).
[1] Tel.: +61 08 93606580
[2] Tel.: +88 028852016.
[3] Tel.: +88 0 2 8419633 5; fax: +88 02 8419636.

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getting rich in OHS domain, mostly focusing general industries that cover from manufacturing to construction to public organizations. Table 1 presents a brief survey on prior OHS studies. However, it is observed that OHS research in academic institutions is glaringly low. But, students and academic staff represent a lion share of the learned society; any incidents in academic institutes would have serious consequences to the present and future of a nation. Among the limited studies in academic organizations, most are actually obsessed with safety issues of the laboratories and focus on the proper implementation and/or practice of scientific procedures. For instance, the extant literature claim that, in medical and scientific research, laboratories use chemicals that are hazardous for human life (Hankin and Britter, 1999; Young, 1991), and therefore, institutes are always under the threat of serious accidents. But the "laboratories are very rarely audited by health and safety professionals" (Marendaz et al., 2013, p. 168). Interestingly, there exists a missing link – a safe laboratory in a faulty building is as bad as having no precaution. In fact, a number of safety incidents are reported which actually take place because of overall operational and managerial scope of OHS measures. Consider the following example: in almost every year serious terrorist activities are seen in USA's schools that terribly shock the whole world. Unfortunately, literature is not ostentatious addressing such non-technical issues, which actually demands more holistic approach than merely ensuring lab safety. Hence, the main focus of this study is on the drivers of overall safety in academic institutes – from behavioral perspective. In other words, the objective of this study is to examine the factors that drive an academic institution to intend to adopt OHS measures.

Methodologically, this study used a quantitative approach. We first develop a research model from existing literature that integrates concepts from information systems, and institutional and marketing theories. The research model also presents formal hypotheses, which are developed from prior studies. Then, the constructs and their relationships have been tested with empirical data obtained from a survey conducted in six private universities in Bangladesh. Bangladesh is chosen for the following rationales.

It is generally agreed that, the overall status of OHS practices is better in the leading and internationally accredited universities which are mostly from developed countries; it will be a unrealistic assumption if we expect the same in other universities especially when they are from developing countries. The workers in developed countries perceive that their organization will ensure all preventive measures of work-related risks and ensure their safe return to home after work (Zacharatos et al., 2005); moreover, an employee may refuse to work if s/he finds his/her workplace is not safe enough from occupational hazards. However, this is not necessarily the case in developing countries (Oughton, 2010). Prior literature also demonstrated that, developed countries have both mandatory and voluntary guidelines for OHS issue in their organizations (Islam and Jain, 2013; Robson et al., 2007). Moreover, government or its regulatory bodies are very strict on safety laws, violations of such regulations may result fines and criminal prosecutions against organizations (Gray and Scholz, 1993). On the contrary, OHS related laws and regulations as well as their implementation are quite fragile in developing countries. For instance, Pringle and Frost (2003) found that despite the 2002 OHS regulations, workers' safety is still a misnomer in China. Complimentarily, Belal and Owen (2007) identified same problems in Bangladesh.

Among many developing countries, Bangladesh is a topic of interest when the discussion is made under the light of occupational safety and hazards. In recent times Bangladesh witnessed increasing number of accidents in workplace, which raise global attention. For instance, the recent collapse of Rana Plaza (a building near the capital city consisting several export-oriented garment factories) resulted more than 1127 people to die due to poor OHS practice and government monitoring (Burke, 2013). Sev-

Table 1
A brief literature survey of existing literature on OHS.

Area	Methodology	Sample	Significant factors	Reference
Manufacturing	Empirical	In Canada, survey of 138 managers	Management trust, organizational factor, social factor	Zacharatos et al. (2005)
	Empirical	Steel manufacturing, 408 response	Management commitment	Watson et al. (2005)
	Empirical	Survey – 53 participants	Safety systems	Borofsky and Smith (1993)
	Empirical	Manufacturing and Mining in Australia, 326 employees survey	Safety knowledge, safety climate, and motivation of management	Griffin and Neal (2000)
	Qualitative	49 group leaders interview	Management commitment and leadership	Hofmann and Morgeson (1999)
Garments	Both qualitative and quantitative	In Australia, questionnaire survey	Management experience, regulatory and competitive pressure	Mayhew and Quinlan (1999)
Retail stores	Qualitative	Content analysis	Soft regulations result poor OHS performance	Islam and Jain (2013)
Academic institutions	Empirical	Survey 920	Safety climate and management commitment	Wu et al. (2008)
Mining	Qualitative	In China; literature review	Regulations; management commitment	Pringle and Frost (2003)
	Quantitative	300 Coal miner survey	Risk taking behavior and job attitude	Paul and Maiti (2007)
Public agency	Qualitative	In UK, 8 interviews	Competitiveness, training, budget	Smallman and John (2001)
Healthcare service	Empirical	Misc. employees, survey of 98 employees	Safety climate	Burke et al. (2008)
	Qualitative	Longitudinal study of 33 interviews	Safety climate	Neal and Griffin (2006)
Construction	Empirical	Survey with 374 employees	Management commitment Supervisor support, internal group processes	Siu et al. (2003)
Transport sector	Empirical	In Norway, survey of 1442 participants	Supervisor support, risk and work pressure	Storeth (2007)
Military	Qualitative interviews	Content analysis of 42 infantry soldiers	Work pressure, safety motivation, safety climate and supervisor support	Zohar and Luria (2004)