

BOOK REVIEW

**Satapathy, S, Realvasquez Vargas, A & Mishra, M.,
*Occupational Health Safety Factors and Their Impact on
the Mental Health of Workers (1st Edition), Singapore,
Springer Nature, 2023, 128 pp.,
ISBN -13-978-981-99-7618-8 (pbk)***

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This book is part of the series New Perspectives in Behavioural & Health Sciences, which to date, consists of three books, all published in 2023. These books are targeted towards a wide range of professionals and academic researchers in various fields of study, including - but not limited to - mental health, social work, health and safety.

The eight chapters of the book under review have studies that have considered varied work practices, placing emphasis on not only physical stress but also psychosocial stress over a variety of job issues. These include repetitive work, high noise level exposure, dusty environment and their stress impact on the workers' physical and mental health, which contribute to an increase in occupational accidents and fatalities.

The identified impacts echo the World Health Organization's (2022) alert that "1 in every 8 people in the world live with a mental disorder" (p. 4). Reduced work quality, increased absenteeism and lost productivity are among the related collaterals, with substantial impacts on the global economy.

This book is informed by a broad and a successful study, that covers a very diverse range of jobs, investigating the mental health and workplace hazards in physical workplaces, such as construction and mining, agriculture / farm, and white-collar workers.

Specifically, the authors flag a multitude of hazards and risks in dairy farms, agriculture, and construction work. The authors mention seven classifications of hazards, highlighting not only physical musculoskeletal strain, but also the stress caused by other factors over which there is limited or no control, such as weather and environmental changes, crop yield, and the unknown associated financial gain or loss eventually reaped from hard work. These concerns are compounded by the presence of seasonal, unskilled and untrained workers, who are much more at risk of getting injured.

The book highlights the importance of introducing safety factors, ergonomics and periodic training, and the need of scientific analysis for a Safe Systems of Work.

Address to gender and age in the work performance is noteworthy and laudable. This expands the work of feminist educators active in the context of Italy's lauded 150 hours in working class education in the 1970s, and who also focused on mental health work hazards affecting women.

In the literature review on mental health and workplace hazards, the authors review multiple studies (approximately sixteen papers), extracting numerous quotations from a wide variety of authors on a broad collection of occupations; ranging from the high-risk firefighters, mining, construction, teachers and administrative works. Here the emphasis is on interrelations between physical, psychological, and mental health (Satapathy, 2023, pp. 7-11); and how the stress disturbs workers' lives and may provoke them to indulge in increased smoking, alcoholism and substance abuse (Satapathy, 2023).

Two points that I have issues concern the claims that because jobs vary in their nature and conditions, safety regulations must also differ to protect lives and create a risk-free working environment; and that if organizational stakeholders, management, and governments act promptly on safety and sustainability, workers' occupational safety can be fully ensured (Satapathy, 2023). In my opinion, the health and safety risk assessment and establishing a safe method of work is carried out precisely to reduce risks to a level as low as is reasonably practical (ALARP), and not risk-free, nor guaranteed hundred percent. From my experience, in an overwhelming number of cases, the main limitation would be the great financial expense required, that may make the industry's commitment financially unviable.

On the other hand, I fully concur with the stated outcome that occupational safety and accidents have a great impact on the company's reputation and productivity (Enrico Cagno, 2013)

The book also tackles ranking and prediction of sustainability and safety in agricultural sector, analysis of the physical workload, and impacts on mental health.

This is done through a detailed study on both male and female farmers includes an extensive variety of data collection and mathematical analysis, which requires specialised knowledge in research methods to fully appreciate the metadata and interpret the results. Hence, this chapter is more targeted towards the academic researcher.

More generally-speaking, the chapter illuminates how the farming profession encapsulates many hazards because of the physical repetitive work, exposure to environmental elements, chemical fertilizers and pesticides, and risk entailed in the use of machinery - all with detrimental effects on physical or psychological wellbeing.

The book's discussion of construction and mining workers considers high risk and exposure to multiple hazards, and related high injury rate. Indeed, research in this sector found that over one in every four miners suffers injuries inside the mine, and half of the miners suffering from body pain, cardiovascular disorders, hypertension, and mental stress - amongst others (Bauerle, 2018).

The book under review features a study that scopes mines in eight countries, all south of the Equator. Priority is given to risk factors, and to the mental health situation examined by statistical analysis. This is a very realistic study that gives due consideration to how several construction workers are semi or unskilled, lacking proper training or awareness of the regulations, or working for private contractors in irregular employment.

The resultant outcome is that construction workers are more stressed than miners owing to the latter's slightly better training and stricter work regulations.

The book also tackles how white-collar workers are exposed to less physical stress, but much higher mental pressure and stress levels. This has increased over the years due to the competitive environment to increase efficiency and productivity. Advances in technology are causing stress by blurring the work-life boundaries, making one connected to one's work 24/7. The featured study found that that utility officers and engineers scored very high with respect to mental stress levels, and that limited mental health was more predominant among women (Satapathy, 2023).

In sum, a headline finding of this book is that workplace stress is the main cause of psychological stress and mental illness (Satapathy, 2023).

The book is written in easy understandable English terminology, facilitating understanding, without heavy use of technical terms. It however requires a solid understanding research methods to fully appreciate the research and interpretation of the vast data, and to inform an enhanced understanding and awareness of mental health issues that is of assistance to its readers and researchers.

References

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