



## A REVIEW

# Occupational health hazards associated with different professions of working women

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**Abstract :** Globalization, modernization, industrialization and many more, the life scenario of women and became her an educated mindset who knows morals of life but now it's really became tough to maintain between their health and work. In today's world working women are not only responsible for the normal activities of a housewife but also care for family members according to their needs and wants. But currently working women face a variety of health risks due to not completing the struggle for professional health. Various health risks such as safety, chemical, physical, biological, mechanical, ergonomic and psychological are found in almost all types of technology. Most working women are under a lot of pressure in various fields that affect their productivity, efficiency, personal health and work ethic. Therefore, the current review paper emphasizes occupational health hazards associated with different professions of working women in various fields.

**Key Words :** Hazards, Health, Musculoskeletal, Occupational, Problems, Risk, Safety, Working women

**View Point Article :** Solanki, Reena and Dua, Kavita (2023). Occupational health hazards associated with different professions of working women. *Internat. J. agric. Sci.*, **19** (1) : 342-346, DOI:10.15740/HAS/IJAS/19.1/342-346. Copyright@2023: Hind Agri-Horticultural Society.

**Article History :** Received : 11.10.2022; Accepted : 16.12.2022

## INTRODUCTION

An “occupational hazard” is any condition at workplace that endangers the health of workers. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), the government organization is responsible for keeping workers safe and has divided occupational hazards into six categories : safety, chemical, biological, physical, ergonomic, and occupational hazards (Anonymous, 2021). These types of hazards are commonly found in

all types of occupations. Different studies show different results in different occupations. According to Rai *et al.* (2021) a large proportion of healthcare workers in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) were exposed to biological hazards, psychosocial hazards, ergonomic hazards and chemical hazards and recommend that occupational safety is a public health concern in order to protect health workers from LMICs. Another study by Amare *et al.* (2021) also reported that the prevalence of psychosocial risks were 92.7% followed by mechanical

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risks (84.8%), biological risks (66.2%) and physical risks (66.2%) represent health risks at work for healthcare workers during clinical practice. In handicrafts, the repetitive nature of manual work in women causes wrist pain, grip fatigue, and other musculoskeletal disorders that are multiplied by housework (Melkani *et al.*, 2021). In the banking sector, a study conducted by Mekonen *et al.* (2022) revealed that more than one-fifth of bank workers experienced job stress. Pandey *et al.* (2022) revealed that the high extent of discomfort faced in various agricultural activities were in transplanting (75.24%) followed by harvesting (65.25%), weeding (57.41%), cleaning fields (55.21%) and threshing (35.89%), respectively.

India working women are facing competitions and challenges at workplace in different occupations. They are performing dual role in balancing personal life and professional life. In personal life, they are very active in managing household work, handling children and family cooking etc. And in professional life, they provide financial support to their family members according to needs and requirements. In spite of that in India, men are still considered as primary winner and the head of the family. Every day, a working woman suffers from severe stress due to the constant struggle to balance personal and professional health hazards in different occupations. The results of Razafimahef *et al.* (2022) revealed that menstrual disorders and risky pregnancy as key sexual and reproductive health issues which are considerably linked with psychological and organizational factors.

Present scenario reflects how working women are exposed to various occupational health hazards in different occupations. Globalization, modernization, industrial development and much more, opened up new opportunities for women to succeed in life. From this, the role of working women in our society has also changed and women are extensively involved in all occupations and professions, which were occupied by men earlier. Various successful careers such as construction, handicrafts, industry, doctors, banks, nurses, lawyers, engineers and educators. Apart from this, the majority of employed women play an important role in the informal sector and a few in the formal sector. Saikia *et al.* (2021) in his study reported that more than half (54%) of participants entered the informal sector because of their spouse's unemployment. Half (50%) of participants reported experiencing sexual comments

followed by teasing (52%), vulgar comments (46%), whistles (42%) and inappropriate touching (16%). And concluded that women in this sector have problems related to job security, social support and exploitation. Improperly designed equipment, slippery floor, insufficient fire safety measures, improper seats, work-related pressure, poor workplace design and operating procedures and especially lack of protective equipment etc. those are the risks that have a negative impact on the health of working women and particularly found in almost all types of work. Another study by Girma *et al.* (2022) revealed that the main factors that contributed to occupational accidents were lack of occupational health and safety training, non-use of personal protective equipments and working more than 48 hours per week etc. Working women face a major challenge in overcoming occupational health hazards and ensuring safety. That is why the occupational health and safety measures are a matter of immediate concern in various occupations. Therefore, the current review paper emphasizes working women hazards in different professions.

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

A systematic literature review was undertaken of studies available in Open access, Elsevier, Pub Med and other journals between 2018-2022. The review detected 22 studies addressing the issues of occupational health hazards faced by the working women in different occupations.

### Occupational health hazards associated with different occupations :

The impact of occupational health hazards associated with different professions of working women in various occupations are discussed as given below:

#### Agriculture sector :

Women in agriculture are facing different health issues related to various activities such as land preparation, nursery raising, transplanting, weed control, pest control, manuring and fertilizing, watering, harvesting and transport in poor working conditions. And where they suffer from occupational health hazards due to badly designed machinery, inadequate information about application of fertilizers and pesticides, abuse, and stress associated with personal and professional life. Meenakshi and Panneer (2020) in their study concluded that

occupational health hazards have a direct impact on the health and mental health of female workers and pointed out that India is a major agricultural country that lacks a formal framework to address occupational health issues, faced by female workers. The implementation of social and welfare measures for women in agriculture can improve the lives of working women.

Another study by Borah and Borah (2021) revealed that most farm women in rural areas participate in a number of activities such as composting, furrows, sowing, harvesting, transporting, etc. under vegetable production along with household work and animal husbandry work which was very tedious, repetitive and full of boredom.

#### **Banking sector :**

In banking sector, working women faced many challenges in balancing both personal and work life and contribute finance to their family members according to their desires. It provides financial assistance to their families and also raises their life style only. To live a good and healthy life, working women are really working hard. A working women these days is continuously facing different health hazards due to constant struggle of balancing family and professional life and to fulfil the requirements of satisfaction level of their family members. A study by Hafiz (2018) concluded that out of 100 respondents, 30% women workers experienced mental pressure followed by 29% face depression and 26% of females considers gender discrimination at workplace.

#### **Textile sector :**

The textile industry employs various workers in various categories in garment making procedure under which they exposed a number of chemicals that affect their health. In some textile industries, various workers were killed and injured due to inadequate facilities of workplace system and occupational health and safety practices. A study by Shaikh *et al.* (2018) concluded that risk factors such as noise, fire smoke, smoking, fatigue, alcohol consumption, work stress and cotton dust particles to a large extent which affect employee health and other reason of hazards was the non-availability of personal protective equipment at worksite which indicates that OHS procedures were not properly followed. Another study by Azad *et al.* (2022) concluded that workers' headaches and eye strain were caused by inadequate lighting, ventilation systems and noise. And a

dirty workplace and long working hours create a problem of back, joint and chest pain.

#### **Industrial sector :**

Women in the mines suffer from multi-faceted health problems throughout India. Mining profession are notoriously male dominated and women are struggling to negotiate with the community and the mining company. And women workers are now involved in different mining operations. Arnold *et al.* (2019) reported that the major workplace hazards experienced in the workplace were excessive noise (78.3%) followed by other aspects such as poor lighting, overcrowding, increased temperature and poor ventilation which was commonly seen at worksite. And found that workers don't have proper knowledge about machines because for them it was difficult to understand and 28.9% of areas showing only safety signs. Another study by Alif *et al.* (2022) concluded that coal mine workers are at increased risk of mortality from respiratory disease mortality but have reduced risk of prostate cancer, cardiovascular and cerebrovascular mortality.

#### **Health care sector :**

Health care workers (HCWs) working in healthcare industry are exposed to many risks. It was divided into different categories such as dentists, nurses and midwifery professionals, pharmacists, and other health professionals. [WHO] A health care facility is a workplace that aims to care for patients about diagnosis, treatment, and prevention activities [CDC]. In the healthcare industry, working women face various health risks such as infectious diseases, epidemics, work-related stress, shift work, etc. The health of working women in the healthcare industry is an urgent matter. Jayaselvi (2020) concluded that out of every 100 respondents, 59.17% of the respondents experience health risk whereas 40.83% said that they did not experience any health risks at work. Another study by Thirunavukkaras *et al.* (2021) also revealed that HCWs face many occupational health risks during their working hours and also found fewer risk related to biological and non-biological factors. And suggested to conduct regular training and subsequent evaluation of environmental safety measures for HCWs.

#### **Handicrafts :**

The Indian handicraft industry offers great job

opportunities to women and especially for those which are considered under vulnerable sections of society. Under this, working women are heavily involved in the production of handicrafts. A study conducted by Melkani *et al.* (2021) concluded that neck and shoulders pains badly due to continuous sitting and to keep watch down constantly. When women get up after a long time they suffers from severe pain due to constant bending. Another study by Melkani and Mehta (2020) revealed that squatting the main postures of working women that cause musculoskeletal disorders. And suggested that facilities in relation to back support, eye-level works, wrist support, storage and light requirements are essential in the workplace to increase productivity.

### Construction :

The construction industry is considered to be the informal sector of the economy and has unskilled women until their working life span. Women working in the construction industry are at greater risk and have acquired problems such as musculoskeletal disorders, back pain, skin problems and respiratory problems etc. Banu and Kumar (2018) results concluded that 84.2% of employees complained about urinary tract infections followed by 15.8% who don't have. About 70.7% employees are diagnosed with musculoskeletal disorders, four fifth of whom have respiratory problems, 59.7% have skin problems, 43.9% were dust-resistant and 89.5% had back pain. Another study by Akinlolu and Haupt (2020) found that very little attention was given for the health and safety needs of women. Due to inadequacy, health problems increases and affect their performance at workplace. And to suggest considered on different factors such as physical fitness, personal protective equipments and anthropometry principles for improving the health and safety of women at construction sites.

### Conclusion and recommendations :

This review paper give main emphasis on impact of occupational health hazards associated with working women in various professions. It presents overwhelming evidence that woman workers suffer from different occupational health hazards in agriculture, banking, textile industries, industrial sector, health-care sector, handicrafts and construction. Working women face continuously several health hazards in their occupations. To overcome the occupational health problems or hazards of working women, it's compulsory to understand that

long standing working illness are only preventable but rarely curable. If the excessive workload and long working hours of working women should be reduced then automatically their physical, mental, social and psychological health is taken care of. Proper training about adequate work practices in different occupations should be given to working women about how the occupational exposures affect the physical, mental, social and psychological health because there are number of problems which the women face from such type of exposures *i.e.* irregular work, work load, poor health status, communicable diseases, epidemics, heavy physical work, workload at workplace, shifts and so on. Besides these, working women more focus on occupational safety and health programmes (OSH) because these programmes help working women in keeping the professional environment relatively free from potential hazards. Also the government should be concerns on working women to provide necessary safety measures at their working place.

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