

Introduction

Public Health Inspectors face a wide range of occupational health hazards on their job as their job duties include working in a various areas from food premises to waste management tasks. The knowledge of these particular hazards can help initiate policies and training for PHI to decrease the negative impact of exposure on the health of public health inspectors. The aim of this study was to ascertain occupational health and safety hazards, which public health inspectors encounter in their job.

Methods

- Study participants were recruited from the Canadian Institute of Public Health Inspectors from a list of registered members
- Potential participants received an invitation email, which contained a consent form and link to an online survey
- The survey consisted of 53 questions
- The survey included questions regarding six categories hazards such as chemical, physical, biological, safety, psychosocial, and ergonomic, health and safety hazards

Discussion

100% or 128 participants indicated exposure to one or more occupational health and safety hazards (see Table 2). 28 out of 128 participants reported exposure to all six hazards tested in the survey. Safety hazards were the most frequently encountered by public health inspectors. Chemical and biological hazards were second and third mostly reported. 71% of participants reported inspection of food premises as the activity associated with the largest number of hazards.

As per comments given by public health inspectors on the improvement of public health and safety in the workplace, many participants would like to have training on “personal safety, resolving conflict and identifying dangerous situations” (see Table 3).

Resuming the findings of this study, it is recommended to provincial public health units to organize staff training on recognition, self-protection, and minimizing hazard exposure.

Conclusion

To our knowledge, this was the first study in Canada of occupational health and safety hazards experienced by public health inspectors. The study identified the association of everyday job duties of public health inspectors with occupational hazards. Further research can be done to determine the effect of the hazards on people’s health status.

Results

Table 1: Characteristics of respondents

Characteristics	Number of respondents
Age	
22-29	23
30-39	39
40-49	34
50-59	27
60 and older	4
Gender	
Female	78
Male	47
Job experience years	
Less than a year	6
1-4	25
5-9	29
10-14	20
15-19	19
20 or more	29
Unite type	
Urban	23
Rural	23
Both	82

Table 2: Hazards

Hazard type	Number of participants exposed to hazards	Number of participants not exposed to hazards	Number of exposed to hazard DAILY	Number of exposed to hazard ONCE A MONTH	People somewhat concerned about hazard	People not concerned about hazard	Top hazards
Chemical	104(81%)	22(17%)	57(56%)	11(11%)	47(46%)	22(21%)	1.Chlorine 2. Quaternary ammonia 3. Pool testing and treatment chemicals (hydrogen sulfide and peroxide, bromine, etc.)
Physical	67(54%)	39(31%)	33(50%)	4(6%)	35(53%)	9(13%)	1.Noise 2.Heat stress 3. Cold stress
Safety	108(91%)	11(9%)	68(62%)	8(7%)	62(58%)	6(5%)	1.Slip and fall 2.Slip and Fall 3.Poor lighting
Biological	99(84%)	12(10%)	26(26%)	11(15%)	53(53%)	6(6%)	1.Food borne viruses 2. Blood borne viruses 3. Vector borne disease/Zoonotic disease
Ergonomic	92(78%)	21(18%)	81(86%)	0	46(50%)	5(5%)	1.Bad posture while driving 2.Carrying heavy inspection equipment 3.Working on a computer/digital device
Psychosocial-harassment	58(49%)	50(42%)	23(40%)	6(10%)	29(50%)	5(8%)	
Psychosocial-violence	76(64%)	35(30%)	25 (32%)	14(18%)	44(57%)	2(2%)	

Table 3: Selected comments

What tasks results in your being exposed to violence in the workplace?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • every situation • fines are high in tobacco violations and people get very angry when they receive fines
What tasks results in your being exposed to harassment in the workplace?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • harassment from Sr. PHI & Managers. Harassment results when management fails ... to communicate among themselves.
Indicate which of the following social risk factors causes you mental distress
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • additional assigned duties, new programs with minimal training • seeing dead bodies during funeral home inspections, not being able to help poor living conditions at premise we have no jurisdiction on and then hearing person passed away from potential neglect • no full-time work
Describe the nature of the circumstances which led to your most recent occupational injury or disease
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • in my 28-year career, I have had plates smashed inches from my face, soup thrown at me, knives waved in my face, and verbal abuse/harassment.
What is of most concern to you with respect to health and safety in the workplace and how do you believe it could be improved?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • it would be great to receive more training on personal safety • better training in resolving conflict and identifying dangerous situations • employer constantly turns a blind eye to needs of staff over needs of clients. The client is always right approach makes it difficult to maintain any respect in the public's eye.

Contact Information

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