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ADMINISTRATIVE PERSONNEL AND HEALTH HAZARDS IN NIGERIA TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS

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Abstract

The effect that occupation may have on a worker's health is dependent on the exposure (express quantitatively) to relevant agents and on a host of factors. Administrative personnel in the tertiary institutions are constantly exposed to a host of factors that cause hazards to their health. These factors may create adverse effects on the health status of the personnel during their employment or after their retirement. This paper examines different categories of administrative personnel and health hazards encountered as they discharge their duties. It also discusses the causes of administrative health hazards, drug abuse, and the effects of hazards on administrative personnel in Nigeria higher institutions. Administrative personnel who are constantly exposed to health hazards may face changes in both body functions and performance abilities. It is recommended that humour should be introduced in the work place. There should be a formulation of policies regarding drug and alcohol use by administrative personnel. Internal and external working environment should be improved.

Keywords: Administrative personnel, health hazards, drug abuse, performance

Introduction

Health Hazard may cause measurable changes to an employee, such as occupational asthma, cancer etc. These changes are

generally indicated by the occurrences of signs and symptoms which show on the employee, such as shortness of breath, a non-measurable subjective feeling etc. Taking a history is often very important in identifying relevant exposures and linking them to ill health. The concepts of "cumulative exposure" i.e. quantitative measures of the intensity of exposure and the duration of exposure is important; since generally it is the main determinant of risk. Health may be harmed by occupational exposure can be affected. Work is an important determinant of health. It can influence health positively or negatively. For most people, work is essential for economic, social as well as physical well-being (WHO, 2004).

Occupational health and care provision have been considered as integral parts of employee's health in the working places. The working environment may create adverse effects on the health status of the employee during their employment or after their retirement. The major occupational health hazards are known as biological, chemical, mechanical, psychological, social, and environmental health hazards. Occupational health concept has not matured and practiced in developing countries as expected. Due to the poor attention, improper planning and policy formation, and no expertise in this field, the scope of occupational health lining below the expected standards. In developing world such as Nigeria, occupational health is taken a less important aspect of industrial and factory acts, as well as management giving less priority for the physical well-being of human health, but ignored other important dimensions such as mental, social, psychological. Emotional and so on which are inseparable parts of health. Occupational health concerns health status and required needs for the employee in his occupation and occupational environment. Before the 1950s, it was taken as a sum of external conditions and influences which prevail at the place of work and which have effects on the health of the working population. Such an environment which deteriorates or affects or may affect the health of employees is known as occupational health hazards. The occupational health hazards may create adverse effects on the health status of the employee during their employment or after their retirement.

Concept of Administrative Personnel

Administrative personnel in Nigeria higher institutions are individuals providing other than direct services to students. They are mostly non-teaching staff, such as bursars, registrars, directors, security guards, office assistance, clerical staff, account clerks, etc.

Key Administrative Responsibilities

Key administrative responsibilities in the university include:

- ✦ Supervision of academic affairs such as hiring, promotion, tenure, and evaluation (with faculty input where appropriate).
- ✦ Maintenance of official records (typically supervised by a registrar).
- ✦ Maintenance of audit of financial flows and records.
- ✦ Oversight of student life and activities, such as religious, cultural groups, career centers, and public service centres.
- ✦ Library and archive management (by libraries and archivists)
- ✦ Maintenance and construction of campus buildings (the physical plant).
- ✦ Maintenance of the campus grounds
- ✦ Safety on the campus (often organized as an office of public safety or campus police).
- ✦ Supervision and support of campus computer and network (information technology).
- ✦ Fundraising from private individuals and foundations (development on advancement).
- ✦ Research administration (including grants and contract administration and institutional compliance with federal and state regulation).
- ✦ Public affairs (including relations with the media, the community, and local, state, federal government).

Concept of Health Hazard

A health hazard is a warning against what could potentially adversely affect one's health. Health hazards are warnings given in the short or long term whenever there is a danger of a person doing something that might run counter to his health or puts him in danger or causing an accident to himself or others. And in a more general sense, health hazards are anything literally anything...

that could cause health problems for individuals or groups of people.

We know that many of those hazards are, and there are many that are unknown, this study has been able to fish out some of these health hazards imminent in tertiary institutions.

Types of Administrative Health Hazards in Tertiary Institutions

The occupation presents different types of occupational health hazards faced by various employees in different fields of employment.

Some of these occupational health hazards include the following:

- Biological health hazard
- Chemical health hazard
- Mechanical health hazard
- Psychological health hazard
- Social health hazard
- Environmental health hazard

The above listed types of health hazards cut across all sections of the employment profession ranging from manufacturing, processing, and academics. For the purpose of this work, the discussion is limited to a selected few which relate to the topic under discussion which includes:

- Mechanical health hazard
- Environmental health hazard
- Psychological health hazard

Mechanical Health Hazard: In the late 1930s, it was discovered in the United States (U.S) that there was an increasing rate of mechanical health hazards among employees in the higher institution. This led to research work carried out by Turner (1942), a health consultant at the University of Minnesota, USA. The research work was carried out in the University of North Carolina also in the US, and after one week of research, Turner came out with the result that the increased rate of mechanical health hazard witnessed across the US as a result of lack of qualified personnel (employees) to handle most of the mechanical equipment found in most universities technical laboratories used for research work or

for lecturing the students. He, therefore, opined that mechanical health hazard is a type of hazard which is sustained as a result of unqualified personnel and operating mechanical equipment. Woo (1990,) defined mechanical health. Hazard as a health hazard or health injury pertaining to or involving machines. He, therefore, explained that mechanical health hazards are witnessed in most institutional due to lack of trained personnel who are capable of handling educational equipment or machines found mostly in engineering departments of higher institutions used by the institution as a means of educating the students. He furthermore explained that for institutions to reduce such incidents, there should be regular training of personnel handling such machines or better still employ qualified personnel to man those machines.

Environmental Health Hazard: According to Webster's dictionary, environment is defined as the surroundings, especially, the materials and spiritual influences that affect the growth, development, and existence of a living being. Environmental hazards are most common in the developing countries. This is a result of a lack of government regulation on the environment. Environmental hazards include the following: solid waste, air pollution, noise pollution, liquid waste, and chemical radiation (US Research Agency, 1946). In 1960, the environmental protection agency-an independent US government agency that controls solid waste, pesticide, through research developing and training programmes, filled in a report to the US government concerning the environmental condition of most tertiary institutions in the Western part of the U.S. The document contained the environmental working condition of most tertiary institutions of learning. This document showed that most institutions paid less attention to the school working environment and that most academic personnel absent themselves from academic activities due to ill health. It further showed that most tertiary institutions were built on non-environmental friendly areas, lack of facilities to control solid waste, and noise from surrounding industries hampered the academic activities of the institutions. This report gave rise to the development of the Environmental Health and Safety regulations act for higher institutions by the US government.

Psychological Health Hazard: Are kinds of hazards that affect the psychological reasoning of an employee. WHO (1948) defined health as the state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease and infirmity. Following this definition, the World Health Organization (WHO) published a report in the same year on the causes of psychological health hazards on institutional employees. It identified some of the causes to include the attitude of employers, employee task level, stress, family background, etc.

These causes were identified as having direct psychological effects on the employee which hampers the mental capabilities of employees.

Causes of Administrative Health Hazards in Tertiary Institutions

The causes of employee health hazards are multiple and complex. In efforts to understand this, researchers and practitioners have focused attention on modifiable risk factors associated with employee illness expecting that changes in these risk factors would result in corresponding changes in the working environment. Recent review suggested that health risks are associated with employees' low performance. Aldana (2001); Reidel Lynch, Baase, Hymel and Peterson (2001) concluded that obesity, stress, working environment, medical history, alcohol, drug abuse, toxic chemicals and a presence of multiple risk factors are associated with an increased rate of health hazards among administrative personnel in tertiary institutions. Aldana (2001) also indicated that the association between low productivity and other health risk and behavior such as cholesterol, physical inactivity, and hypertension remains unclear. However, the body of literature upon which these conclusions are based is small. Upon these assumptions, it would be important to explain some of the causes of health hazard in tertiary institutions which are:

- Working Environment
- Medical history of employee/ HIV
- Stress
- Alcohol abuse
- Drug abuse
- Toxic chemicals

Working Environment: Individual studies have identified a significant association between working environmental factors and health hazards. There have been many attempts to categorize the effects of the environment on the employee to define them in various ways. The term working environment has to do with both the external and internal working environment. According to a UK official statistics report (2000), every year, about 2,000 lives are lost through an unhealthy working environment. In Nigeria, a recent survey conducted by a private research institute in 2007 showed that most tertiary institutions in Nigeria were built on land that are not environmentally friendly. The working environment in which an institution employee finds his/herself has a great effect on the medical condition of the employee. The environments of higher institutions should be free from noise, and air pollution, solid and liquid waste etc. The institutions should be able to maintain a clean environment to demonstrate the true existence of the institution. Government in developing countries should enact laws to control the environment and maintain good working conditions.

Medical History of Employee/Human Immune Virus: It is important to know the medical history of an employee before employment. Many employees of higher institutions are employed without going through the medical check process during interviews. Ojamba (2010) defined a medical check as both the physical and mental examination of one's body by a competent or qualified doctor in an approved hospital. Medical history of every employee should be ascertained before employment to determine the fitness or unfitness of an employee to handle a particular position. Employees with chronic health problems if employed should be placed in a very suitable working environment due to their health conditions, and the institution ensures that they go for a regular medical check. It is of paramount importance that higher institutions before employment, subject its employees to medical check to avoid unnecessary labour suits in time of event qualities.

Stress: Webster dictionary of advance learning, defined stress as a state in which strong demand is made on the nervous system. A recently published opinion poll conducted by a private research

institute in the US on the causes of occupation stress showed the following results; Job specification; Employee task level, Employee wage and Number of dependents (family)

Subsequently, in the United Kingdom (UK) data on the medically reported incidence of occupational stress and work-related ill health showed that about 20,000 employees report occupational-related stress per year at the rate of 55 persons per day. Occupational stress is a deadly hazard with the capability of killing twice faster than any other occupational health hazard. Employees given a difficult task to handle are likely to face occupational stress because in an effort to accomplish such task the employee strains the nervous system, resulting in a breakdown in the central nervous system (US Medical Association Publications, 2010). Some of the effect of occupational stress on employees includes: Hypertension, High blood pressure and increased mental problems low productivity etc.

Alcohol: Abuse of alcohol can seriously impair an employee's health and ability to work and study. It may also cause the individual to endanger the safety and well being of others. Alcohol is the drug most frequently abused on colleges, campuses, and in our society. Even a small amount of alcohol significantly impair your judgment. The consumption of alcohol may be an interacting factor in the incidence of aggressive acts of employees in higher institutions. Moderate to large amount of alcohol can severely hinder your ability to learn and remember information because alcohol is a depressant. Very large amount can cause respiratory and cardiac failure, resulting to death.

Drug Abuse (Cannabis, Marijuana and Tobacco)

This includes the use of cannabis and marijuana by employees of higher institutions. Marijuana impairs short-term memory and comprehension of the user. They can cause confusion, anxiety, lung damage and abnormalities of the hormonal and reproductive system. Hours after feeling or getting high fades, the effect of cannabis on coordination and judgment may remain, heightening the risk involved in driving or performing other complex tasks. Cannabis, a fat soluble substance, may remain in the blood system

for weeks. An overdose may bring about paranoia, panic attack or psychiatric problems (U.S Drug Law Enforcement Agency, 2010).

In the case of tobacco, Nicotine the active ingredient in tobacco, increases your heart rate and raises your blood pressure. The tar in cigarette smoke is a major cause of cancer and other respiratory problems. The carbon monoxide in cigarette smoke can promote "Arteriosclerosis". Long term effect of smoking cigarettes may include, emphysema, and lung cancer. Employees who indulge in such act impair their abilities to perform their duties effectively.

Toxic Chemicals: This health hazard is faced mostly by employees of higher institutions working in institutional research laboratories, workers without adequate protective equipment are regularly exposed to harmful chemical component. In 1896, the first chemical accident was recorded in the University of Illinois in US. The accident happened in the university research laboratory, with the cause of the accident identified as an unlawful tampering of a toxic chemical identified as an undiluted acid by an employee.

The following is a target organ categorization of effects which may occur, including examples of sign and symptoms. These examples are presented to illustrate the range and diversity of effects a toxic chemical can have in workplace, especially in University laboratories and the broad scope employers must consider in this area.

- (a) **Hepatotoxins:** Chemical which produce liver damage. Signs & Symptoms: Jaundice, liver enlargement
Chemicals: Carbon tetrachloride, nitrosamines
- (b) **Nephrotoxins:** Chemical which produce kidney damage.
Signs & Symptoms: Edema, proteinuria
Chemicals: Halogenated hydrocarbons, uranium
- (c) **Neurotoxins:** Chemicals which produce their primary toxic effects on the nervous system.
Signs & Symptoms: Narcosis, behavioural changes, decrease in most functions
Chemicals: Mercury, carbon disulfide
- (d) **Agents which act on the blood or hematopoietic system:**
Decreases haemoglobin function; deprive the body tissues of oxygen.
Signs & Symptoms: Cyanosis, loss of consciousness

Chemicals: Carbon monoxide, cyanides
(e) **Agents which damage the lung:** Chemicals which irritate or damage pulmonary tissue
Sign & Symptoms: Cough, tightness in chest, shortness of breath

Chemicals: Silica, asbestos
(f) **Reproductive toxins:** Chemical which affect the reproductive capabilities including chromosomal damage (mutations) and effects on fetuses (teratogenesis)

Signs & Symptom: Birth defects, sterility
(g) **Chemicals:** Lead
Coetaneous hazards: Chemicals which affect the dermal layer of the body.

Signs & Symptoms: Defatting of the skin, rashes, irritation
Chemicals: Ketones, chlorinated compounds

(h) **Eye hazards:** Chemical which affects the eye or visual capacity

Signs & Symptoms: Conjunctivitis, corneal damage
Chemicals: Organic solvents, acids

Effects of Hazards on Administrative Personnel in Tertiary Institutions

There is no doubt that health hazard has a serious or great effects on employers who pay no attention to proper working conditions. The adverse health effects of those hazards can range from anxiety to coma and death. The United States Department of Labour (2009) identified the following as the effects of health hazards faced by university employees.

- Occupational Asthma
- Cancer
- Absenteeism
- Low productivity

Occupational Asthma: In our present day environment, occupational asthma is on the rise. It is caused by sensitization from exposure in the workplace. A person who is diagnosed with asthma may have asthmatic symptoms due to work place exposure.

Chemical sensitization, animal dander, flour proteins, and dusty environment are frequent causes of occupational asthma. It may be difficult to diagnose because many employees do not relate

the effect to the cause. When an employee becomes sensitized to a substance (chemical or dust), his/her body may react to a small amount of exposure. Chronic exposures to the triggering chemical can cause permanent lung damage, chronic asthmatic symptoms, and possibly death. An asthmatic who is on medicine should not work in an area where there is exposure to the triggering substance. Employees in the higher institution should learn to recognize and avoid harmful exposures as a way to prevent chronic health problems resulting from occupational asthma.

Cancer: According to International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) (1997), there were about 430,000 newly reported cases of occupational cancer in the US alone in 1997. The university employees accounted for one-fifth of this population. Disorders associated with repeated trauma, stress, and toxic exposures accounted for four percent (4%) of the 6.1 million cases recorded across the world the same year. Cancer has been identified as an increasing trend in occupational health hazards among employees of tertiary institutions. This is caused by increasing stress and multiple tasks performed by employees of tertiary institutions.

Absenteeism: The causes of absenteeism among employees of tertiary institutions are multiple and complex. In an effort to find out and understand the effect of absenteeism, researchers and practitioners have focused attention on the causes of employee absenteeism. Recent reviews suggest that health risks or factors are associated with absenteeism. Hymel & Peterson (2001) concluded that obesity, stress, and the presence of multiple risk factors are associated with an increased rate of absenteeism.

Reaching a definite conclusion about the association between absenteeism and causes of health hazards is tenuous due to differences in the way the absenteeism dependent variables have been measured and in the way that demographic variables have been used to provide clarity to results, in an effort to reach a definite conclusion on the causes of absenteeism among employees of tertiary institutions, Cole and Richard (2001) conducted a research on the causes of absenteeism among university employees in the UK. The population used for the research were 20,000 employees drawn across from universities in the United Kingdom

(UK). A sample size of 20,000 were employees used to represent the population, collected through a stratified random sampling method. At the end of the research, Cole and Richards (2001) came up with a series of causes of employee absenteeism. Health-related factors were at the highest on the list and, therefore, they drew up the conclusion that the highest cause of employee absenteeism among universities employees are health-related issues.

Low productivity: Health hazard has been identified by the Medical Association of Nigeria (MAN), as a contributing factor to employee low productivity. The productivity level of employees who are constantly exposed to health hazards is bound to be poor because of health challenges.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study is to examine the causes and effects of health hazards on administrative personnel in tertiary institutions and proffer solutions to the phenomena. Administrative personnel exposed to health hazards may face changes in both body function and performance abilities and signs and symptoms may occur to signal these changes: Occasionally, a substance or an environment can cause an effect to administrative personnel that is rarely seen in the population at large, such as "Nephro-toxing" which causes kidney damage and caused by exposure of some harmful chemical substance found mostly in University research laboratories this making it easier to ascertain that occupational exposure was the primary causative factor.

Recommendations

There should be introduction of humour in the work place. Humour is seen as comic quality causing amusement, mental disposition or temperament, a freakish inclination. Many educational organizations bring in humour consultants to conduct workshops on the topic of humour in the workplace and spend a day studying ways to make people relax so that they can be more productive.

There should be formulation of policies regarding drug and alcohol use by employees: The institutions should be committed to maintaining a drug and alcohol-free environment for its students

and employees. In compliance with applicable Federal and State Laws, Employees or students who violate such Federal and State Laws concerning drugs or alcohol should be subjected to criminal prosecution. Those who violate the institution's policies on drug and alcohol use may also be subjected to institutional sanctions.

The institutions should provide insurance plans for their employees to cover for any loss, injury, and psychological hazards encountered in performing their duties. This should also serve as a motivational package to employees to boost their productivity level.

The employees of institutions are adversely affected by some common occupational hazards. The institution should improve the internal and external working environment and should supply essential protective measures to all staff who are involved in indoors as well as outdoors activities in their duties. The health insurance scheme and other health facilities should be accessible to all the employees' institutions should label all hazardous substances in an effort to identify the potential hazards within the area. Also, personnel should label all of the hazardous substance, and make sure that laboratory safety information card is complex for each laboratory.

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