

Title: Impact of the macro environment on the reporting of occupational injuries and illnesses by low income workers compared to middle income workers in South Africa

Wellington F Mudenha¹, Nisha Naicker¹, Tanusha Singh^{1,2,3}

¹Department of Environmental Health, University of Johannesburg, Doornfontein Campus Johannesburg, South Africa,

²Immunology & Microbiology, National Institute for Occupational Health, a division of the National Health Laboratory Service, Johannesburg, South Africa

³Department of Clinical Microbiology & Infectious Diseases, School of Pathology, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa

Correspondence: wellingtonmudenha@gmail.com

Abstract:

Introduction

Section 14 of the Occupational Health and Safety Act and section 22 of the Mine Health and Safety Act require workers in mining, construction and manufacturing within South Africa to report occupational injuries and illnesses to employers, however, under-reporting is common globally. Previous studies focused on workplace internal micro factors that cause under-reporting. This research investigated the impact of macro environment factors outside the workplace (economic, political and legal, demographic, socio-cultural and technological) on reporting and compared reporting between low and middle-income workers.

Methods

A sequential mixed methods research design was applied. A questionnaire completed by 169 low and middle-income workers from 6 construction, mining and manufacturing companies in Gauteng identified macro environment factors affecting reporting. In-depth interviews with occupational health and safety subject matter experts established their opinion concerning factors which impact reporting. Descriptive statistics were used to summarise the data.

Results and Discussion

Prominent macro environment factors which affect reporting were social (language or communication barriers – 30.8% and racial differences with the person an employee must report to – 26.7%), demographic (high unemployment among workers in the same profession – 41.5% and difficulty in finding future employment due to age after losing a job from a workplace injury or illness – 33.1%) and economic (fear of job termination or layoff – 42.6%, reduced work hours or working light duty – 36.1% and salary pay cut while recovering at home following an occupational injury or illness – 30.7%). Experts interviewed agreed that economic factors have the greatest and similar impact on reporting to low and middle income workers. A limitation in the study was conducting the research only in Gauteng province.

Conclusion

Specific social, demographic and economic macro environment factors affect reporting by low and middle income workers. Employers must manage both micro (internal) and macro (external) factors that may prevent workers from reporting.