

Occupational Safety and Health Hazards Associated with Informal Sector Enterprises at Magaba, Mbare, Harare Zimbabwe

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Abstract: - Occupational safety and health issues are a critical aspect of the developmental agenda in Zimbabwe. This study investigates the hazards associated with the informal sector activities at Magaba in Mbare high density suburb of Harare. To achieve this, interviews and observations were employed in data gathering together with secondary data. The study was conducted at Magaba, situated in Mbare, the oldest high-density suburb in Harare the capital city of Zimbabwe. Findings revealed that the hazards included fires, gas explosions, cuts, violence, noise, falling among others. In order to ameliorate the safety and health risks there is need for the informal enterprise operators to be capacitated and educated on occupational hazards. The responsible authorities need to regard the informal sector enterprises in the same manner as the formal sector by ensuring proper coming up and enforcing of safety legislation.

Key Words:-Informal Sector, Safety and Health, Magaba, Harare

I. INTRODUCTION

In most developmental issues, be they formal or informal safety and health issues are topical. The aim of this study was to analyse the occupational hazards associated with informal sector enterprises at Magaba in Harare Zimbabwe. The existence of occupational hazards can be traced back to “ancient man the hunter and gatherer who became the natural prey of his carnivorous neighbors” according to French (1993). Throughout the history of antiquity, the Stone Age, Iron Age, right up to the industrial era, man has always been plagued by injuries and fatalities (Kotze 1992). In most developing countries such as Zimbabwe economic activities are dominated by the informal sector and the workers in this sector are exposed to a multiplicity of occupational hazards of all forms and not much is done to reduce them.

An informal activity is characterized by ease of entry, reliance on indigenous resources, family ownership, small scale cooperation, and labour intensive and adaptive technology, skills acquired outside the formal and unregulated and competitive markets.

According to a report of Indonesian unemployment in 1999 the urban and rural people migrated to informal sector rather than into open unemployment and this is the case in Zimbabwe where unemployment levels are high and the economy is melting and inflation wild. Like any industrial activity, the informal sector is prone to occupational hazards

which expose the informal workers, visitors and customers to risks. The hazards to which the informal workers are exposed are classified by Danton (1984) as mechanical hazards (which constitute injuries sustained from machinery), biological hazards (resulting from bacteria, fungi and viruses), chemical hazards (resulting from gases, liquids and solids). Additional hazards include ergonomic hazards that arise from the amount of exertion to the body and its movements such as fatigue and irritation. Psychosocial occupational hazards on the other hand, have a bearing on the workers’ state of mind and their daily living within the work place area at Magaba, Mbare in Harare.

The small, medium and informal sector companies grouping in Zimbabwe (2002) indicated that the informal sector alone accounted for about 1.1 million jobs and to date almost 86% are informal. The health and safety of people involved in these activities is given little attention if any in Zimbabwe. The Safety, Health and Environment watch dogs such as the National Social Security Authority (N.S.S.A) have no legal documents that protect the informal sector as is the case in the formal sector. The informal sector is regarded as useless because there is no health and safety law, yet it is the artery and life-blood of the economy in Zimbabwe. The level of exposure to hazards in the informal sector is not known, yet they are indeed working around life threatening hazards. According to Takala (1992), safety is the state of being protected against physical, social, spiritual, financial, political and occupational hazards and according to World Health Organization (WHO 1999) health is the state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing of human beings. These two aspects are part of the informal sector and need careful examination. In fact, the informal sector contributes significantly towards the economy yet little attention is given to protect the workers within this part of the economy.

The survey employed observations and interviews. Both quantitative and qualitative data was obtained from secondary and primary data sources. Primary data was extracted from the field of study in its raw state and this firsthand information was obtained using interviews and observation critical institutions such as the National Social Security (NSSA), Ministry of Small and Medium Enterprises as well as the Zimbabwe Informal Sectors Association. In this study; on-

spot observation were carried out to back-up and validate information obtained from interviews. The information gathered was all to do with risks in the informal sector as well as where these are dominant. Also critical was to see the levels of understanding by the informal worker on risks and how to reduce them.

II. STUDY LOCATION

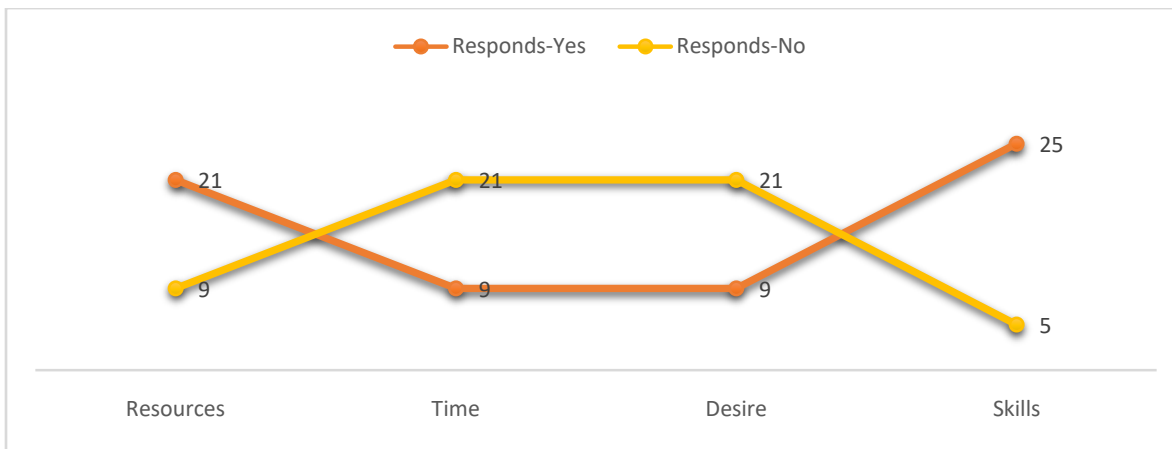
The study was conducted at Magaba a place situated in Harare’s oldest residential suburb and characterized by a variety of informal activities. This is close to the main Mbare bus terminus and is situated at corner Rotten Raw road and --- ---. Behind the premises is Mukuvisi River. The place is home to over 10 000 different units of people selling, manufacturing and other informal activities. Magaba is the largest site in Harare and Zimbabwe where various informal activities are undertaken. Magaba is an informal sector location that is situated in Harare the capital of Zimbabwe. It is located about 1.5 km south of the city centre and was created in the early 1990s.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Types of Hazards

Seventy eight percent (78%) of the respondents noted that the informal sector was dominated by hazards that include fire, gas, violence, noise, sharp metals, dust excessive heat chemicals, fumes, ergonomic hazards, falls and several others. This shows that the informal workers are aware of the hazards that surrounds their work place. Though the informal workers are aware of hazards they do not do much to reduce the risks associated with their activities. There is abject negligence on the the part of government and the people, that causes accidents rather than these accidents occurring naturally. The informal worker is aware of all the dangers close and around his work place but because of the need for survival much effort is focused on income generation at the expense of their health and safety. evidence of absolute negligence of safety issues in the informal sector that can result in accidents. It was revealed that out of 30 respondents 21 indicated that the informal worker was aware of the hazards around them but had no enough resources to help them observe safety issues. Nine (9) had no time to look for hazards surrounding them because all they looked for was making money. Nine (9) did not have the desire to look for hazards and protect themselves and 25 of the 30 indicated that the informal worker had no skills to help them work within the confinements of safety. This is shown in the graph Figure 1below.

Figure 1: Factors Affecting Safety in the Informal Sector



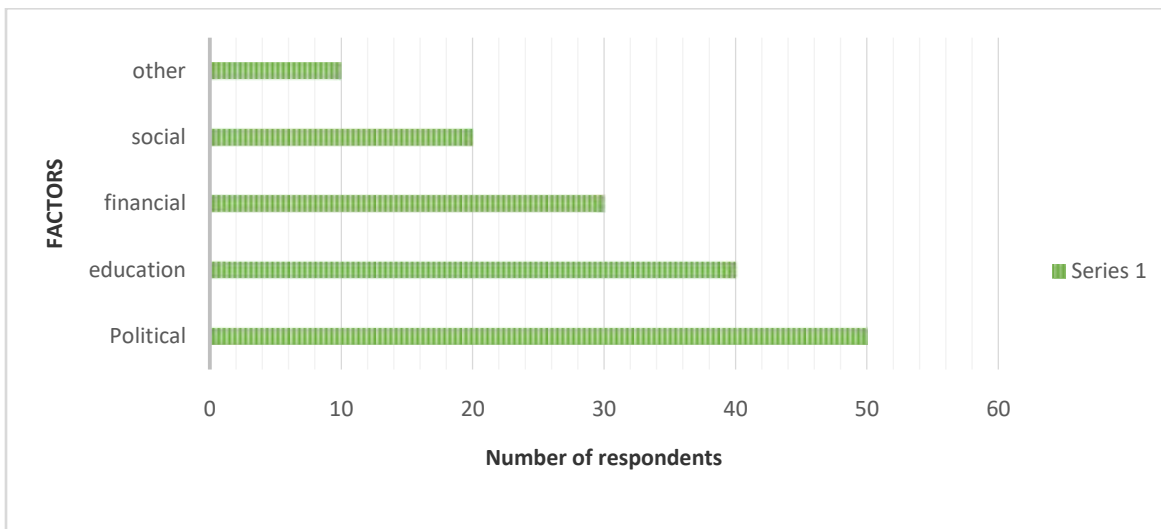
Source: Field survey 2019

The resources which they do not have include money for training on safety issues such as first aid and firefighting and buying proper equipment that is safe to use. They do not have skills because they do not have money to train and that there is no training center for the informal workers at Magaba or anywhere else in Zimbabwe. They are supposed to join mainstream education system which is expensive and time consuming to the informal worker. The education system also requires some level of education to enroll and also that time taken going for such training should be used for informal work than education on safety and health issues.

Challenges Associated With Safety Management In The Informal Sector

Several factors were identified by the respondents as hindering safety issues. These factors include political, educational, financial, social and several others. Figure 2 shows the number of respondents who supported the fact that the above factors were hindering safety issues in the informal sector at Magaba.

Figure 2: Challenges to Safety in the Informal Sector



Source: Field survey 2019

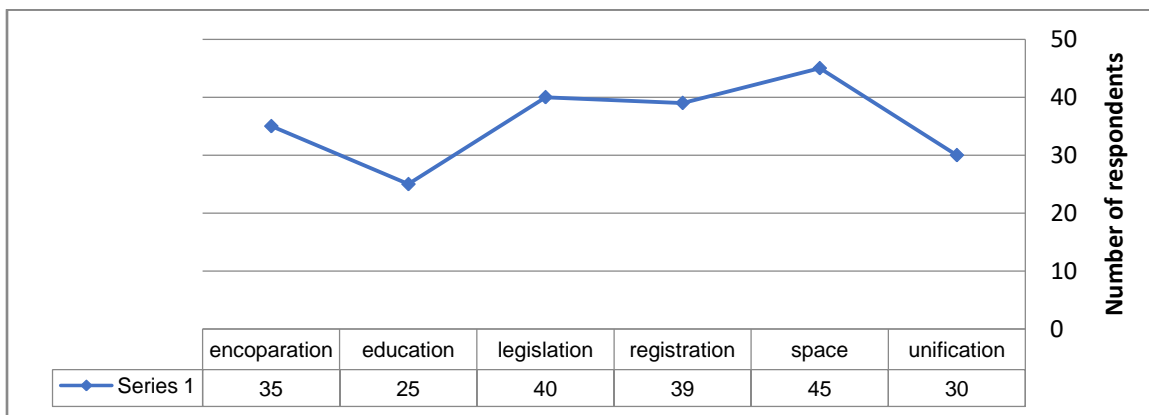
About 40 of the respondents indicated that safety issues were not upheld in the informal sector at Magaba because the informal workers were not educated and most of them indicated that the institutions that train safety issues require some educational level that they do not have for them to be enrolled, hence safety issues remained utopian to them. All the 50 respondents indicated that the political situation did not permit safety to be upheld as people do not obey safety issues for political reasons. One respondent said that one’s political affiliation determine what one can do as the politically powerful can skip safety protocols. Thirty (30) of the respondents indicated that the biggest challenge in safety issues in the informal sector is financial. They said that the reason why they were in the informal sector was that they needed money and safety issues were secondary. One of the respondents said, “money was more critical than safety”. This was fortified by some who indicated that if they could not afford bread for their families safety was not . Moreover, they

blamed the government for failing to fund safety issues in the informal sector. Some also indicated that social beliefs affected safety as women could not put protective clothing because men would call them names. About 10 of the respondents indicated other factors such as lack of willingness to observe safety issues; their general work environment which they said is not catered for by the local authority.

Suggested Solutions to Safety Issues in the Informal Sector

Several factors were listed by the respondents as possible solutions to the safety problem in the informal sector. These were among others the fact that the informal sector should be incorporated into mainstream economy and be governed by formal legislation. Some suggested legislations, registration of the informal worker, some talked of national programmes on the national television station such as talking safety and several others. Figure 3 shows the number of people who suggested certain solutions out of the 50 respondents.

Figure 3: Solutions to Proper Safety Implementation In The Informal Sector



Source: Field survey 2019

From the above information about 35 of the respondents advocated for the incorporation of the informal worker into mainstream economy and 40 out of the 50 respondents suggested that the government should pass legislations that recognize, protect and teach safety in the informal sector. Forty-five respondents indicated that they need space to ensure that the over crowdedness they face currently at Magaba and expose them to hazards is reduced and proper monitoring done. About 25 of the respondents advocated for national programmes such as talking safety and 30 suggested that there is need to bring together all ministries and departments in government that deals safety to avoid fragmentation of safety issues. Thirty five of the 50 respondents suggested that the informal workers be registered to allow easy identification for training by the government.

IV. CONCLUSION

Activities such as carpentry, welding, food processing, fence manufacturing, tyre trading among others are common in the informal sector since they do not require any educational qualification hence and thus attract many entrepreneurs. These activities do not also require large amounts of capital and in some cases only need the physical ability to work. The common hazards associated with the informal sector include stress, hand and foot injuries, noise, violence and tuberculosis. Informal workers are not trained and do not have skills to handle some of the machinery that they use for example wood cutting machines, gas and cutting torch, welding machinery and so on. This exposes them more to the hazards that already surrounds them. Despite the use of such machinery without any form of skills there are no institutions that help them to acquire such skills and the few that are available such as technical and vocational colleges are very expensive for them and sometimes require certain level of education for one to be enrolled. This leaves the informal worker without option but to soldier on and blindly in an environment that is risk and hazard infested.

Little is being done by authorities to ensure that the safety of the informal worker is upheld at Magaba. It was also noted that there was more of political issues than the welfare and safety of the people. In fact, one of the respondents indicated that safety is a secondary issue to them as one's political affiliation and support are more critical when being allocated a space to work from rather than abilities and knowledge on safety issues. The people are packed and if fire erupts then the whole premises will be destroyed.

Non-governmental organizations are not doing anything to lift the informal sector from its down trodden position to a better position were the informal worker is given the same position as the formal worker with regards to health and safety. In fact, there are little if any NGOs that educate the informal worker about safety and some fail to do so because of the economic and political environment which they attribute to interfere with their operations. There is no safety center at Magaba to

advise the informal worker about the risks and hazards that they face in their day in day out activities.

The donor community was not helping the informal worker to acquire safe equipment or improve on the machinery they already have. This they attributed to the poor economic environment being currently experienced. HIV/AIDS is a hazard that dominates the informal worker, but they are providing end of pipe solutions to the issue.

The electricity supply is poor and very dangerous to the informal worker because those who do not have proper connections installed by the Zimbabwe Electricity Supply Authority (ZESA) often use unprofessional ways to get power. This ordinary way of connecting power exposes people to dangers such as outbreaks of fire and electrical shocks. The processing of food at Magaba also exposes the informal workers to diseases such as cholera, typhoid and diarrhea. This is because there is no inspection by health personal of the premises for certification to ensure that the food is safe. This is worsened by the fact that even if the health inspectors want to inspect, they may be denied access by the people and because of the political atmosphere they fail to do the inspection.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Government come up with a comprehensive registration of the informal worker to become part of mainstream economic whose safety is a priority and there be political, economic and developmental will to have a paradigm shift and have the informal sector be treated just as the formal sector especially with regards to health and safety issues by coming up with a law to help them on safety. The informal workers are not fully unionized or belong to professional bodies in their great numbers. It is therefore strongly recommended that informal workers get unionized and, in this way, they would enjoy advocacy and representation as far as their safety is concerned. They can also benefit from rehabilitation centers in the event of accidents. It is apparent that the issue of informal industries in Zimbabwe is given less attention and it is recommended that there be legislation provision to guard and curb accidents that may befall the informal worker just as is legislation for the formal sector. The government must establish clinics, or first aid station and a fire station close to Magaba. This will ease the risks that may arise due to the work environment at the premises.

It is recommended that Trade Unions and Government expose the informal worker to safety guidance. This is because they need orientation on the dangers inherent in the activities they do. They should also orient the unemployed as they might drift into the informal sector. There should be national programmes on the national television station on occupational health, safety, environment and quality to teach not only the informal worker but all citizens on hazards and risks that are inherent in every work atmosphere be it in agriculture, mining, manufacturing and other work environment. This

should be done just like in talking farming, there should also be talking safety. And there is need for Public Private Partnership in safety issues in the informal sector to ensure that safety in this sector is upheld.

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