

OCCUPATIONAL RISK ASSESSMENT IN THE HOSPITAL

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In the hospital sector, workers are exposed to many occupational hazards. Hazard identification and assessment, as a structured and systematic procedure, although it is obligatory by law in Greece, does not take place in hospitals as it already is in other workplaces.

The aim of the present study was the development, implementation and evaluation of a risk assessment methodology for occupational hazards in hospitals.

A cross sectional study was designed, using multiple triangulations, by different data sources and methods. A tool was developed, which was tested and found reliable and valid for its purpose and used in two hospitals, one general (A) in Athens and one specialised (B) in Thessaloniki, which consists of three parts: 1. An Inspection Checklist on Health and Safety Hazards, 2. An Occupational Health and Safety Staff Questionnaire, 3. A Hazard Identification and Action Record Sheet. There were 248 (68,9%) questionnaires completed by staff and 27 hospital units inspected by experts in hospital A and 199 (79,6%) questionnaires and 29 units in hospital B. Noise and microclimate measures were also performed.

The findings of the study showed that, experts and staff evaluated occupational hazards at the same level of risk in many cases. For those cases that varied, this difference could be due to the workers' lack of knowledge, which perhaps contributed in over-estimation of the risk level, while experts, as external evaluators, might under-estimated the existing risk level, a fact that highlights the need of re-evaluation. In the inspected hospital departments, measures of control and improvement are necessary for hazards, found of medium and high-risk level.

The staff perception of risk, it was found to be influenced by the service in which they were employed, the length of working experience and the level of education. These factors should be taken into account towards their active participation in risk assessment studies. In addition, there is a need for training programmes for the staff in order to be appropriately informed on health and safety issues.

The major conclusion drawn from this study was that further research is needed on health and safety issues in the hospital sector. The proposed methodology could be a useful tool for use in any hospital area. It could contribute to the enforcement of relevant legislation, and to the existence of a safer, more efficient and effective working place, such as the hospital.