

Employer Obligations on Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) Laws A Contemporary Review

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Abstract: This study examines the obligations of employers under Sri Lanka's Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) laws and their implications for Human Resource Management (HRM). As the legal framework surrounding OHS evolves, it becomes imperative for organizations to ensure compliance while fostering a culture of safety and employee well-being. The article outlines key employer responsibilities mandated by the Factories Ordinance and related legislation, including the provision of a safe work environment, risk management, employee training, and incident reporting. It further analyzes the strategic role of HR professionals in integrating organizational health and safety compliance into HR practices, enhancing workforce engagement, and minimizing workplace hazards. The findings underscore the importance of aligning OHS obligations with HRM strategies to promote organizational success and a healthier workforce. Through recommendations for effective implementation and ongoing training, this study aims to provide HR professionals with the tools necessary to navigate the complexities of OHS laws in Sri Lanka, ultimately contributing to safer workplaces and improved employee morale.

Keywords: *Employer Obligations, Human Resource Management, Occupational Health and Safety Laws*

Introduction

Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) laws are fundamental to ensure the well-being of employees in any workplace, particularly in a developing country like Sri Lanka, where industrialization and economic growth have intensified the need for effective safety regulations. The Sri Lankan legal framework governing OHS is primarily established under the Factories Ordinance No. 45 of 1942, complemented by the Workmen's Compensation Ordinance No. and the Shop and Office Employees Act. Factories Ordinance No. 45 of 1942 is the primary national law now in effect pertaining to occupational safety and health, including updated and pertinent regulations. Furthermore, *“every citizen of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka is guaranteed the freedom to pursue any legitimate profession, trade,*

industry, or activity, either alone or in collaboration with others”, according to Article 14(1)(g) of the Constitution. All citizens are guaranteed a secure and healthy environment by Article 27(7), (8), and (14) of Chapter VI of the Constitution, which is titled "Principles of State Policy and Fundamental Duties of the State."

The fundamental duties of employers to ensure workplace health and safety are outlined in Sri Lankan law. These consist of a general duty of care, risk assessment, safe equipment and machinery maintenance, provision of protective gear, training employees on hazard identification, safe practices, and emergency protocols, and protocols for reporting and looking into accidents to find the underlying causes and prevent recurrence. The Department of Labor is the primary agency responsible for health and safety administration and



enforcement. The Ministry of Health plays a role in workplace health, especially in addressing diseases. The Central Environmental Authority is important for addressing workplace hazards impacting the broader environment.

These laws have imposed specific obligations on employers to create a safe working environment, manage risks, and protect employees from workplace hazards (Gamage, 2019). In Sri Lanka, employers have a legal and moral obligation to provide a safe and healthy work environment for their employees as organizations increasingly recognize the importance of workplace safety, the role of Human Resource Management (HRM) becomes pivotal. HR professionals are not only responsible for ensuring compliance with OHS laws but also for fostering a culture of safety that prioritizes employee health and well-being. By effectively implementing OHS regulations, HRM can significantly influence organizational performance, employee satisfaction, and overall productivity (Wijeratne, 2015).

However, due to poor implementation of health and safety procedures and job discontent, the majority of Sri Lankan employees deal with a variety of occupational health and safety concerns (Kularathna & Perera, 2016). Additionally, because of the common improvement measures put in place, Sri Lanka is further listed with low occupational health and safety (De Silva & Wimalaratne, 2012). Kularathna and Perera (2016) emphasize that the majority of employees have left their companies as a result of job discontent and inadequate implementation of occupational health and safety procedures within the working environment. Accidents that cause fatalities are also a result of poor ergonomics and health risks (Talapatra & Rahman, 2016). Low wages, insufficient benefits, long hours, unhygienic working conditions, job insecurity, and few prospects for career progression are all

consequences of poor health and safety culture practices, which also have a detrimental effect on business profitability (Dheerasinghe, 2009).

Moreover, the researcher found that the scholar's interest in research on employers' role of implementation of occupational health and safety rules in Sri Lanka is limited, leading to a lack of published studies on this topic in the Sri Lankan context. Therefore, there is an empirical gap related to this. Therefore, this article aims to explore the legal obligations of employers under Sri Lanka's OHS laws and the implications of HRM practices. It will examine key responsibilities mandated by legislation, such as providing a safe work environment, conducting risk assessments, offering employee training, and managing accident reporting. Additionally, the article will analyze how these legal requirements impact HRM strategies and contribute to the creation of a safer workplace. And also, by providing insights into the intersection of OHS compliance and HRM, this study seeks to equip HR professionals with the knowledge necessary to navigate the complexities of workplace safety regulations while promoting a culture of safety within their organizations.

Objective of the Study

Main objective

Exploring the Employer Obligations under Sri Lanka's Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) Laws.

Sub Objectives

1. To examine the current legal framework governing Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) in Sri Lanka.
2. To explore employers' obligations under Sri Lanka's OHS laws.

3. To identify the HRM Implications of Organizational Health and Safety Compliance
4. To identify the Challenges in OHS Compliance and provide recommendations for HR professionals on how to incorporate OHS compliance into broader HR strategies.

Literature Review

Occupational Health and Safety

Concerns about the health and safety of workers throughout the Industrial Revolution gave rise to occupational health and safety. Although it is frequently given precedence over worker safety, a healthy workplace can increase output and profitability (Moyce & Schenker, 2018). Businesses in the clothing sector frequently put productivity ahead of employee safety, putting employees through longer hours and risky working conditions. This indicates that companies attempt to boost productivity at the expense of worker safety by forcing workers to work harder and longer hours in increasingly dangerous and harsh conditions. To keep the cost of compensation low, they exclusively take health and safety-related actions. Organizations must make investments in tools, safety precautions, facility design, and work design in order to enhance employee welfare.

In order to prevent injuries, companies should reduce overloaded dangerous storage and guard unguarded equipment (Mahanama and Ratnajeewa, 2018). It is also crucial to have the proper gear, including goggles, clothes, and helmets. The main factor influencing an employee's job satisfaction is their health. According to a 2018 study by the US Department of Health, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the Human Services

Department, 40% of workers experience stress or burnout at work, and 26% experience burnout. Positive impressions and increased employee job satisfaction can result from the implementation of successful safety and health initiatives. Organizations can enhance their overall performance and success by providing security and comfort, enacting proper rules and processes, and protecting the health and safety of their personnel.

Development of Health and Safety Laws in Sri Lanka

The origin of Health and safety legislations in Sri Lanka can be traced back to the early 20th century, under British colonial rule, when the Factories Ordinance No. 45 of 1942 was introduced. This law, aimed primarily at regulating factory work and was one of the first attempts to address the well-being of industrial workers in Sri Lanka. The Factories Ordinance laid the foundation for subsequent laws, introducing basic safety requirements such as proper ventilation, lighting, and sanitation in workplaces. However, this legislation focused narrowly on factory workers and did not extend to other sectors like agriculture or services (Jayawardena & Gunaratne, 2016).

The period following Sri Lanka's independence in 1948 saw limited legislative development in health and safety. It was only in the late 20th century, particularly after the ratification of key International Labor Organization (ILO) conventions, that the country began to address more comprehensive occupational health and safety (OHS) regulations. According to Chandrasiri (2017), the adoption of these conventions led to the expansion of legal coverage to a broader range of industries and helped align Sri Lankan laws with international standards. Key ILO conventions that influenced Sri Lankan legislation include the Occupational Safety and Health

Convention (No. 155) and the Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health Convention (No. 187).

Major Health and Safety Legislations and Regulatory bodies.

The current legal framework for health and safety in Sri Lanka is primarily governed by the Factories Ordinance (as amended in 2003), the Workmen's Compensation Ordinance (1934), the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) Act of 2009, and the Employment of Women, Young Persons, and Children Act (1956).

Factories Ordinance No.45 of 1942

The Factories Ordinance remains the cornerstone of workplace safety regulation in Sri Lanka and last amendment is Factories (Amendment) Act No. 04 of 2021. The ordinance addresses issues such as accident reporting, employer liability, hazardous substances, and the obligation to ensure worker safety through appropriate measures. The ordinance also covers the training of employees in the use of machinery and equipment, a vital component in accident prevention (ILO, 2018). Despite these improvements, critics argue that the ordinance remains outdated, particularly with respect to modern industries such as IT and service sectors, which are not covered comprehensively (Perera, 2020).

Workmen's Compensation Ordinance

The Workmen's Compensation Ordinance offers compensation to employees who are injured or killed in the course of employment. It mandates employers to provide monetary compensation for workers who suffer from occupational diseases or workplace injuries. According to Gunasekara (2019), while this law has been an essential mechanism for worker protection, it has been criticized for its limited scope and the low level of compensation offered.

National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) Act of 2009

The establishment of the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) under the NIOSH Act of 2009 marked a significant advancement in health and safety management. NIOSH's mandate includes research, training, and the promotion of workplace safety and health. It also plays a key role in advising the government on policy matters related to OHS (NIOSH, 2019). However, there have been criticisms that NIOSH lacks adequate resources and staffing to fulfill its objectives, limiting its effectiveness in shaping national policy and enforcement (Wickramasinghe, 2020).

Employment of Women, Young Persons, and Children Act No.47 of 1956

This Act seeks to protect vulnerable populations in the workforce, particularly women and children, by limiting their working hours and prohibiting employment in hazardous environments. According to Ratnayake and Silva (2021), this law has contributed significantly to the reduction of child labor and exploitation. However, the challenge of informal labor, particularly in rural areas, has made enforcement difficult, with many children still engaged in unsafe work conditions.

Department of Labor

One of the main goals of Sri Lanka's Department of Labor is to keep the nation's industrial peace by resolving labor disputes through the application of labor regulations. In order to establish industrial peace, the department also seeks to raise understanding of labor rules among the working population and encourage social discourse. Implementing labor laws that apply to various trades, surveying new trades, and creating standards for those trades that meet worldwide norms are all crucial objectives. Lastly, the agency wants to raise awareness and provide oversight to

ensure the application of methods that guarantee industries' health and safety.

Challenges in Implementation and Enforcement

One of the main challenges Sri Lanka faces in the effective implementation of its health and safety laws is the lack of adequate enforcement mechanisms. According to Perera (2020), the enforcement of health and safety laws is often hindered by a shortage of labor inspectors, inadequate funding, and a lack of coordination among government agencies. Furthermore, many workplaces, particularly in the informal sector, remain outside the scope of official regulation, meaning that a significant proportion of the workforce is left unprotected by existing laws.

The problem is compounded by a general lack of awareness among both employers and workers regarding their rights and responsibilities under health and safety laws. De Alwis (2018) notes that many employers do not comply with regulations either due to ignorance or a perception that compliance is too costly. This attitude is particularly prevalent in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which often operate with minimal oversight. As a result, workers in these sectors are at a higher risk of workplace injuries and occupational diseases.

Recent Developments and Future Directions

In recent years, there have been discussions about reforming Sri Lanka's health and safety laws to better address the needs of modern industries. The government has expressed a desire to modernize the Factories Ordinance and expand its coverage to sectors that are currently under-regulated, such as information technology and telecommunication industries (ILO, 2018). In addition, there have been calls

for increasing the resources allocated to NIOSH and other enforcement agencies to ensure more effective oversight and compliance (Wickramasinghe, 2020). A key future direction involves improving data collection on workplace accidents and diseases. Currently, there is a significant lack of reliable data, which makes it difficult to assess the full scope of workplace hazards in Sri Lanka (Chandrasiri, 2017). More comprehensive data would allow for better-targeted interventions and policies aimed at reducing occupational risks.

Methodology

The main aim of this study is to explore the employer obligations under Sri Lanka's Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) Laws. The study was primarily designed with an exploratory focus rather than a qualitative or evaluative approach. To achieve this aim, the researchers framed the study as a qualitative study rooted in the interpretivist research philosophy. The research investigates the provisions of contemporary labor laws in Sri Lanka, utilizing research articles and documents sourced from multiple databases, including Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, and Web of Science to fulfill the research objectives. Data collection is done through secondary data. Content analysis was utilized to filter and streamline the data for interpretation. The researchers accurately defined the research objectives and reviewed relevant journal articles from acceptable sources, cross-verified the information and carefully synthesized the contents to ensure the reliability and validity of the data. The results were presented through tables and visual representations.

4. Data Analysis

Objective 1 - Examine the current legal framework governing Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) in Sri Lanka.

Sri Lanka has several laws and regulations governing the well-being and security of the workforce. These laws are intended to ensure a secure and conducive workplace

for staff well-being across various industries. Below is a summary of the key laws related to the context which are presented in a table format.

Table 1: Laws and Regulations Governing the Health and Safety of Employees

Labor Law	Summarized Content
<i>Factories Ordinance No. 45 of 1942 (amended)</i>	- It covers health, safety, and welfare of workers in factories. - Specifies requirements for cleanliness, ventilation, lighting, and drainage. - Mandates safety measures like proper fencing of machinery and secure work practices. - Requires reporting of accidents, occupational diseases, and dangerous occurrences.
<i>Shop and Office Employees Act No. 19 of 1954</i>	- Govern the working conditions of employees in shops and offices. - Specifies regulations for working hours, rest periods, and annual leave to ensure employee well-being.
<i>Workmen's Compensation Ordinance No. 19 of 1934</i>	- Requires compensation for employees injured or killed in the course of employment. - Stipulates employer responsibility to provide compensation for workplace injuries, occupational diseases, and deaths.
<i>Employment of Women, Young Persons, and Children Act No. 47 of 1956</i>	- Regulates working conditions for women, young persons, and children. - Sets minimum age requirements for employment and restricts night work for young workers. - Aims to protect vulnerable workers from hazardous work environments.
<i>Mines and Minerals Act No. 33 of 1992</i>	- Provides health and safety standards specific to mining operations. - Mandates safety measures such as ventilation, machinery maintenance, and protection against risks in mines.
<i>National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) Act No. 38 of 2009</i>	- Establishes NIOSH to promote research and training in occupational health and safety. - Aims to improve workplace safety standards through research, training, and public awareness.

Payment of Gratuity Act No. 12 of 1983	• Provides for the payment of gratuity to employees upon retirement or termination after a certain period of service. • Not directly a safety law but ensures financial security, which contributes to overall employee welfare.
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Source: Authors constructed, 2024

In addition to the above, there are other legislations enforced by the government organizations which covered part of OSH such as,

01. **Sri Lanka Atomic Energy Act No. 40 of 2014**
02. **Control Pesticide Act No. 33 of 1980** - few sections of the Act for controlling use of pesticides.
03. **Explosives Act no. 21 of 1956** - to control, and to enable the prohibition of the manufacture, importation, exportation, possession, sale, exposure for sale, supply, purchase, use and transport of any explosives.
04. **The National Policy on Elimination of Child Labor in Sri Lanka** focusing on Child Labor draws, special attention to the situation of girls, the very young, the migrant or children, subject to trafficking and those who do not live with their own families and unprotected children.

In terms of the National Environmental (Protection & Quality) Regulations of 2008, made under the National Environmental Act, Enterprises are required to obtain an Environmental Protection License (EPL) prior to commencement of commercial operations. This EPL is issued by the Environment Management Department of the Board of Investment of Sri Lanka with the concurrence of the Central Environmental Authority (CEA). Based on the **Right to Information Act No. 12 of 2016**, any worker can request

information relating to their occupational safety and health. These laws emphasize both preventive and compensatory measures to ensure the health, safety, and well-being of workers in Sri Lanka. They are particularly focused on working conditions, accident prevention, and worker compensation.

Objective 2 - Employer Obligations under Organizational Health and Safety Laws in Sri Lanka

Employer obligations under Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) laws in Sri Lanka are critical for ensuring a safe and healthy workplace for employees. The legal framework governing OHS in Sri Lanka primarily stems from the Factories Ordinance No.45 of 1942, along with supplementary regulations like the Workmen’s Compensation Ordinance and the Shop and Office Employees Act. These laws delineate the responsibilities of employers to maintain safe working conditions, mitigate risks, and protect employees from occupational hazards.

Employers are required to conduct regular risk assessments, provide appropriate safety training, and ensure the availability of necessary protective equipment. Additionally, they must establish effective reporting mechanisms for workplace incidents and implement preventive measures to reduce the likelihood of accidents and injuries. Compliance with these obligations is not only a legal requirement but also an ethical responsibility that can significantly impact employee morale, productivity, and overall organizational success.

As organizations strive to meet these obligations, Human Resource Management (HRM) plays a pivotal role in integrating safety practices into workplace culture. By prioritizing OHS compliance, employers can foster a proactive approach to health and safety, ensuring the well-being of their workforce and contributing to a positive organizational environment.

1) Provision of a Safe Work Environment

Employers are mandated by the Factories Ordinance to provide a workplace that is safe for employees. This includes ensuring that equipment and machinery are maintained to prevent injuries, and that hazardous substances are managed according to safety standards (De Silva, 2008). HR departments must collaborate with safety officers to implement safety protocols and ensure that these are consistently followed.

2) Risk Management and Hazard Control

The OHS laws require employers to identify workplace hazards and take measures to mitigate them. This includes conducting regular risk assessments and ensuring that employees are not subjected to unsafe working conditions (Wijeratne, 2015). In industries like construction and manufacturing, the implementation of personal protective equipment (PPE) is essential to comply with these legal obligations.

3) Employee Training and Awareness

Employers must provide adequate training to employees on how to safely perform their job functions. This includes training on machinery use, emergency procedures, and health and safety regulations (Gamage, 2019). HR professionals play a crucial role in organizing these training programs and maintaining records of employee participation to demonstrate compliance with the law.

4) Reporting Accidents and Injuries

Employers are required to report workplace accidents and occupational diseases to the relevant authorities as mandated by the Factories Ordinance and the Workmen's Compensation Ordinance (De Silva, 2008). HRM must ensure that internal reporting procedures are in place to handle such incidents promptly and accurately, providing necessary support to injured employees.

5) Compensation and Welfare Provisions

Employers are obligated to provide compensation to employees who suffer injuries or illnesses as a result of their work, in line with the Workmen's Compensation Ordinance (Wijeratne, 2015). HRM is responsible for managing the compensation process, ensuring that claims are handled efficiently, and employees receive their entitlements.

Here is a summary table of employer obligations under Sri Lanka's organizational health and safety (OHS) laws.

Table 2: Employer Obligations Under Sri Lanka's Organizational Health and Safety (OHS) Laws

Labor Law/Regulation	Employer Obligations
<i>Factories Ordinance No. 45 of 1942</i>	Ensure the health, safety, and welfare of employees at work.

	• Provide safe machinery, plants, and systems. • Maintain cleanliness, proper lighting, ventilation, and temperature control. • Ensure fire safety and emergency exits.
<i>Workmen's Compensation Ordinance No. 19 of 1934</i>	• Provide compensation for workers who suffer injury or illness arising from their employment. • Report accidents immediately and maintain accident records. • Ensure medical treatment for injured employees.
<i>National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health Act No. 38 of 2009</i>	• Implement safety measures following guidelines from the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH). • Conduct safety training and awareness for employees. • Cooperate with safety officers in accident investigations.
<i>Shop and Office Employees Act No. 19 of 1954</i>	• Maintain safe and healthy working conditions in shops and offices. • Provide first-aid facilities and welfare amenities. • Limit working hours to prevent fatigue and ensure rest periods.
<i>Employment of Women, Young Persons, and Children Act No. 47 of 1956</i>	• Prohibit employment of young people in hazardous environments. • Ensure proper safety measures for women and young persons. • Maintain records of young people employed.
<i>Employees' Provident Fund Act No. 15 of 1958</i>	• Contribute to employees' provident funds to ensure financial security. • Deduct and remit contributions to the Employees' Provident Fund (EPF).
<i>Employees' Trust Fund Act No. 46 of 1980</i>	• Make contributions to the Employees' Trust Fund (ETF). • Ensure proper enrollment of employees into the ETF scheme.
<i>Mines and Minerals Act No. 33 of 1992</i>	• Ensure health and safety in mining operations.

	• Provide personal protective equipment (PPE) and safety training. • Conduct risk assessments and hazard management in mines.
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Source: Authors constructed, 2024

This table provides a concise overview of the key OHS-related laws in Sri Lanka and the obligations of employers under each.

Objective 3 - To identify the HRM Implications of Organizational Health and Safety Compliance

The obligations set forth by Sri Lanka’s OHS laws have several implications for HRM. HR professionals must integrate safety compliance into their broader HR strategy, ensuring that the workplace not only meets legal standards but also promotes a culture of safety.

1) Policy Development

HRM needs to develop clear safety policies that align with OHS regulations and organizational goals. These policies should cover everything from equipment maintenance to emergency response plans and should be communicated effectively to all employees.

2) Workforce Training and Development

HR’s role in training is critical for OHS compliance. Effective training programs ensure that employees are equipped to handle safety risks and comply with workplace safety regulations. Additionally, ongoing safety education is necessary to keep employees informed about new risks and safety practices (Gamage, 2019). According to Robson et al. (2012), the most commonly used safety management strategy is occupational health and safety training. It was found that the personnel who received the training related to occupational health and safety suffered a lower number of injuries linked to work in comparison to those who

did not receive the training. Employees who receive this kind of training are better equipped to manage their tasks. It also helps them do their jobs safely. Enhancing employees' problem-solving abilities is another potential benefit of training. This implies that it has an indirect impact on safety. It is true that implementing efficient training programs can lower the number of work-related injuries, fatalities, property damage, legal liability, illness, and workers' compensation claims.

3) Risk Management Collaboration

HR departments must work closely with safety officers and senior management to conduct risk assessments and implement control measures. This collaborative approach ensures that safety risks are identified and mitigated before they result in accidents (Wijeratne, 2015).

4) Employee Well-being and Engagement

By prioritizing OHS compliance, HR can foster a work environment that supports employee well-being, which in turn enhances employee engagement and productivity. Employees are more likely to be engaged when they feel that their safety and health are valued by their employer (ILO, 2020).

Instead, the implications of organizational health and safety (OHS) compliance in Human Resource Management (HRM) are numerous, affecting recruitment, training, employee relations, and overall organizational culture. Below is a table that outlines the HRM implications of OHS compliance.

Table 3: The implications of organizational health and safety (OHS) compliance in HRM

HRM Area	OHS Compliance Implications	Outcome for Organization
<i>Recruitment and Selection</i>	Candidates must meet health and safety qualifications. OHS policies influence job descriptions and candidate assessments.	Reduced risks from hiring unqualified or unsafe workers. Improved organizational reputation.
<i>Employee Training</i>	Mandatory OHS training programs to meet regulatory requirements. Training in hazard identification, emergency procedures, etc.	Enhanced safety awareness, reduced accidents, and compliance with legal obligations.
<i>Performance Management</i>	Employees' adherence to safety procedures becomes part of performance evaluations. Supervisors are responsible for OHS oversight.	Better alignment of safety goals with individual and team performance. Lower risks of workplace injuries.
<i>Employee Relations</i>	Stronger focuses on communication and collaboration with employees about safety concerns. Involvement of unions in safety standards.	Improved trust and morale. Greater employee engagement and cooperation in safety initiatives.
<i>Compensation and Benefits</i>	Compliance includes providing workers' compensation for injuries. Risk of increased premiums for non-compliance.	Fair and safe work environment, reduced compensation costs due to fewer injuries and accidents.

Legal Compliance	HR must ensure that the company adheres to OHS laws, including record-keeping and incident reporting.	Avoidance of legal penalties, fines, and litigation related to workplace injuries or non-compliance.
Organizational Culture	OHS compliance fosters a culture of safety and responsibility. HR promotes values of well-being and safety across the workforce.	Positive workplace culture with high employee retention and fewer absences due to injury.
Employee Retention	A strong OHS program enhances job satisfaction and loyalty, as employees feel safer and more valued.	Higher retention rates, lower turnover costs, and increased productivity.
Workplace Design and Ergonomics	HR plays a role in shaping policies regarding safe workplace design and ergonomic assessments to prevent injury.	Fewer musculoskeletal injuries, improved productivity, and higher employee comfort and satisfaction.

Source: Authors constructed, 2024

This table summarizes the ways OHS compliance interacts with HRM functions and the benefits or challenges it brings to the organization.

Objective 4 - To identify the Challenges in OHS Compliance and provide recommendations for HR professionals on how to incorporate OHS compliance into broader HR strategies.

Compliance with Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) regulations presents several challenges for organizations, particularly in developing countries like Sri Lanka. Understanding these challenges is crucial for effectively implementing OHS

measures and promoting workplace safety. Below are some key challenges organizations face in achieving compliance with OHS regulations:

1) Lack of Awareness and Understanding

One of the primary challenges organizations face is the lack of awareness and understanding of OHS regulations among employers and employees. Many employers, especially in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), may not be fully aware of their legal obligations under OHS laws. According to Wijeratne (2015), this lack of awareness often leads to inadequate safety practices and failure to implement

necessary measures. Employees may also lack knowledge about their rights and responsibilities regarding workplace safety, resulting in low engagement in safety initiatives.

2) Resource Constraints

Many organizations, particularly SMEs, face significant resource constraints that hinder their ability to comply with OHS regulations. Financial limitations can prevent businesses from investing in safety equipment, training programs, and necessary infrastructure improvements (Gamage, 2019). De Silva (2008) notes that the allocation of resources for safety compliance is often deprioritized in favor of immediate operational needs, leading to compromised safety standards.

3) Cultural Attitudes Towards Safety

Cultural attitudes toward safety can pose a significant barrier to compliance. In some industries, particularly those with a strong focus on productivity, there may be a prevailing mindset that safety practices are secondary to meeting production targets (ILO, 2020). This attitude can lead to neglect of safety protocols, as employees and management prioritize output over safety considerations. Changing these ingrained cultural attitudes requires sustained effort and commitment from leadership to foster a safety-oriented organizational culture.

4) Inadequate Training and Development

Effective training and development programs are essential for OHS compliance. However, many organizations struggle to provide adequate training for employees regarding safety protocols and practices. Gamage (2019) emphasizes that without regular training sessions and refresher courses, employees may lack the skills and knowledge necessary to operate safely in their roles. Additionally, insufficient training for management and supervisors on safety

leadership can lead to poor enforcement of safety policies.

5) Complexity of Regulations

The complexity and evolving nature of OHS regulations can create confusion for organizations striving to achieve compliance. Employers may find it challenging to keep up with changes in legislation, standards, and best practices (De Silva, 2008). This complexity can result in unintentional violations and hinder organizations' ability to implement effective safety measures. Regular updates and clear communication regarding regulatory changes are essential to ensure compliance.

6) Insufficient Reporting and Communication Systems

Effective reporting and communication systems are critical for monitoring safety compliance and addressing issues promptly. However, many organizations lack the necessary systems to report incidents and communicate safety concerns effectively. According to Wijeratne (2015), inadequate reporting mechanisms can lead to underreporting of incidents, which in turn prevents organizations from identifying trends and addressing underlying safety issues.

Conclusion

Employer obligations under Sri Lanka's OHS laws have significant implications for HRM practices. By understanding and fulfilling these legal responsibilities, HR professionals can not only ensure compliance but also enhance employee well-being and organizational productivity. The integration of OHS into HR strategies is essential for building a culture of safety and minimizing workplace risks. Ultimately, a strong commitment to OHS compliance can lead to a healthier, more engaged workforce and a more successful organization. Moreover, Health and safety laws in Sri

Lanka have undergone significant development, influenced by international standards and local economic conditions. While the current legislative framework provides a foundation for worker protection, it faces challenges in enforcement, coverage, and adaptation to new industries. Strengthening enforcement mechanisms, expanding coverage to all sectors of the economy, and increasing awareness among employers and workers are essential steps for improving the health and safety landscape in Sri Lanka. Continuous reform and resource allocation will be crucial to ensuring that these laws effectively protect the workforce and contribute to the overall well-being of the nation.

Recommendations for Human resource managers

1. **Enhancing Safety Training:** HR should collaborate with external safety experts to provide ongoing training to employees, ensuring that safety practices evolve with technological advancements and new regulations.
2. **Integrating OHS into Performance Metrics:** HR can incorporate OHS compliance into performance evaluations, ensuring that safety becomes an integral part of the organization's culture.
3. **Leveraging Technology for Safety Management:** Using safety management software to track incidents, conduct audits, and monitor compliance can help HR professionals maintain a proactive approach to safety.
4. **Creating a Safety-First Culture:** HR must take the lead in promoting a culture of safety by involving all levels of management and employees in safety initiatives. Safety committees and employee feedback mechanisms can also be established to encourage active participation in safety management (ILO, 2020).

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