

Promoting Occupational Safety, Health, and Well-Being in Emergency Medical Services

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Introduction

- The work in EMS is physically and mentally stressful and may negatively affect the occupational safety, health, and well-being (SHW) of employees.
- EMS workers have higher levels of occupational injuries than the general working population in the private sector.
- Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are characterized by a higher injury frequency than larger companies, especially when considering fatal accidents.
- Employers must conduct risk assessments and take actions to minimize the risks to employees' safety and health.

Aim

- The aim of this study was to investigate and promote the SHW of EMS workers in a small Finnish company.



Materials

- a small Finnish private emergency medical services company
- 24 employees and 2 employer representatives

Methods

- E-survey
 - 25 safety and health risk items, including physical work environment and working conditions, chemical and biological hazards, and physical and psychosocial loads
 - a three-point scale:
 - risk exists and needs to be managed
 - risk is under control
 - no risk
 - 26 completed questionnaires were returned
 - One was completed in group work with the participation of the employer and occupational safety and health representatives.

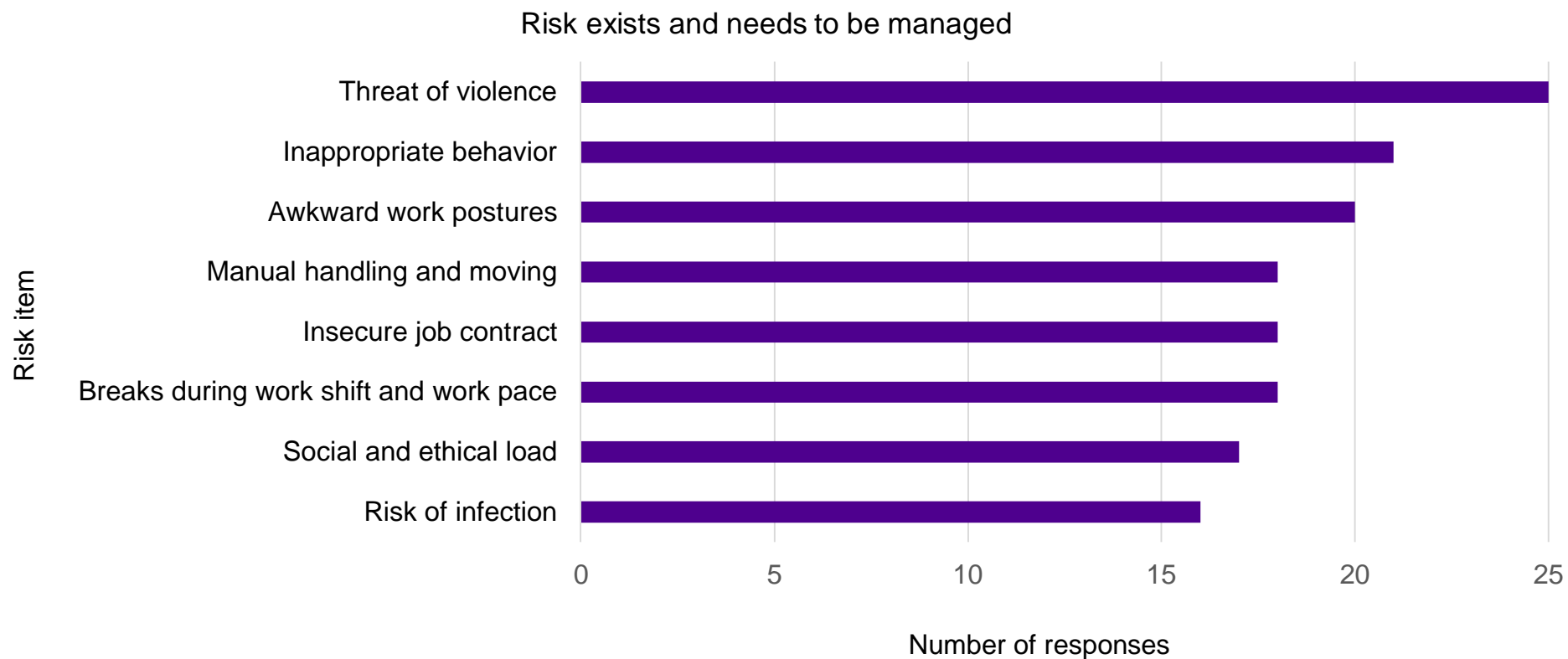
Methods

- Interviews
 - Three group interviews with employee representatives (n = 8)
 - One with the employer
 - SHW resources and stress factors originating from work, the work community, and the worker.
- A remote workshop
 - 24 participants, employees and employer representative
 - discussion of the results of the survey and the interviews
 - co-creatively develop an action plan to promote SHW

Methods

- Feedback survey
 - 11 completed questionnaires were returned

Results – E-survey



Results - Interviews

- Job resources:
 - a sense of work community and a good work atmosphere
 - a team spirit and open dialogue
 - the interviewees treated each other fairly and equally irrespective of education, work role, or form of employment
 - work shifts were arranged with people who knew and understood each other well
 - wishes concerning days off were taken into consideration and managed flexibly
 - a culture of open discussion that fostered learning, new ideas, and opportunities for development

Results - Interviews

- Stressors:
 - lifting and carrying patients without proper lifting equipment and in difficult environments
 - work ergonomics
 - irregular working hours
 - long shifts
 - prolonged sitting during work shifts
 - potentially violent situations

Results - Workshop

The following development actions were decided, and responsible persons or teams were assigned:

- assuming responsibility: clearer definition of work roles and responsibilities
- improvement of the communication process and feedback system
- purchase of durable tools
- orientation/introduction to equipment and tools
- self-directed review of instructions

Results - Feedback survey

- The participants perceived the workshop as pleasant and interactive even though it was conducted remotely.
- The participants felt that they were able to participate in the suggestions and decisions on the development actions.

Conclusion

- The survey and the interviews revealed the threat of violence and physical workload in EMS.
- The most valuable SHW resources were a sense of community, a good work atmosphere, and social support from coworkers and managers.
- The selected development actions were related to responsibilities, communication, tools and equipment, and regular reviewing of instructions.
- The results can be used by EMS organizations and may also be useful for other health-care organizations and SMEs.