

## Management of Occupational Health and Safety for the Control of Psychosocial Risks in Metalworking Companies

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**Abstract:** Some companies with industrial activity at present without proper fashion management psychosocial risks in the workplace this is fundamentally for this type of business to emphasize biological and physical risks, the employees run their activities. The present study of the industrial companies of metalmechanics are managing the safety and the health in the work for the control of psychosocial risks; this is a field study, supported by a quantitative instrument in which three categories are addressed: organizational behavior, personal characteristics and social environment. One of the conclusions is that industries that want to be productive and competitive in the market recognize the importance of protecting the physical, mental and emotional integrity of their employees.

**Key words:** Organizational climate, psychosocial risks, emotional salary, labor empowerment, importance

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### INTRODUCTION

Regardless of the economic activity to which a company is dedicated, its operation, productivity and sustained growth without exception, depend directly on the performance of its human capital. From the above, the importance of companies to effectively manage all processes related to their employees and in the same way, internalize that a highly motivated and loyal staff represents their true competitive base. When employees are satisfied with the activities they perform and with the work environment where they perform their functions, the productivity and consequently the quality of the products and services offered by the company can be significantly increased (Castellanos, 2007). Hence, the latter must strive to ensure affable working environments that contribute to the satisfaction of the physical, emotional and mental needs of its workforce in order to increase motivation and thus business success.

However, in all business contexts human capital is not valued equally, some organizations concentrate only on production, ignoring the importance of the harmonious relationship between the work environment and each of its collaborators. This situation has a negative impact on the organizational climate of the company being reflected in problems of internal communication in the increase of interpersonal conflicts, motivation for work even in the development of occupational diseases by employees

generally of a character psychosocial and psychosomatic factors which cause high rates of absenteeism and annual labor turnover, affecting not only the health and well-being of workers but also the competitiveness of the company in the market.

In the specific case of the metallurgical companies based in the Colombian territory, these have emerged as one of the protagonists of the industrial growth in the country (Lora and Pinedo, 2012) likewise, these companies have a great incidence in the Colombian economy being the which generates 15% of all industrial jobs in the country with an average of 90,000 direct jobs and approximately three times as many indirect jobs. However, “more” employment is not synonymous with “better” employment; some of these companies, especially those categorized as SMEs (Small and Medium-sized Enterprises) in order to substantially reduce their operating costs do not carry out or at least not sufficiently, activities that go towards the safety and physical health. Emotional and mental aspects of their human talent on the contrary, they deal with aspects for them more important as it is the case of improving their technological infrastructure and productive processes.

Studies indicate that the metal-mechanic sector could improve its competitiveness through pos-routes: one, from the reduction of labor costs per person employed or two with the increase of labor productivity (Lora and Pinedo, 2012; Soromenho, 2014; Quintanilla, 2013). This

dual stance is supported by neoclassical economic theory which further proposes that wage increases must be a function of the marginal productivity of each worker (Campos, 2015). But how can an employee increase his productivity if the company does not offer him the necessary conditions to do so?

At present, some organizations in the metal-mechanic sector opt for the first option to reduce their labor costs; For this they not only pay low wages to their employees, but they suppress the quality in the programs of safety and health in the work and other actions of human management that constitute an additional cost for them. Apparently from this strategy of cost reduction, the company can obtain greater profits and be more competitive, however, the reality is another: the employees being exclusively subject to perform their functions, unable to reconcile their working life with their family life without feeling valued and recognized by the company or have the possibility to ascend among other aspects, begin to become unmotivated which results in employees changing their labor vitality by a passive attitude (Vergara, 2013) do not make sense of belonging or commitment by the company (Sanz, 2012) do not enhance their creativity, carry out their activities mechanically and are susceptible to develop psychopathologies that not only slow their operation but can incensurably affect their health.

This suggests higher economic costs and greater investment in time for the company insofar as it must face the desertion or continuous absence of its workers which implies higher costs in the recruitment, selection and training of replacement personnel.

The key is the second option that companies in the metalworking sector choose to improve their productivity and for that it is essential that they manage the safety and health (SST) physical, mental and emotional of their employees, paying full attention to those aspects "invisibles" that are often overlooked such as the needs, feelings, expectations aspirations and goals of your workforce. If companies take these elements into account, they can structure comprehensive OSH programs that allow them to control psychosocial risks and enhance the talents, skills and attitudes of their employees, increasing work motivation and decreasing the possibility of developing physiological diseases such as is the case of neurological reactions; emotional such as depression; mental disorders such as loss of concentration and behavioral such as alcohol or tobacco abuse (Anonymous, 2014).

This study investigates precisely how Colombian metalworking companies are currently managing safety and health at work to control psychosocial risks for this

purpose, a field study is carried out, supported by a quantitative instrument in which three categories are addressed: organizational behavior, personal characteristics and social environment. It is hoped that this research will be the basis for future studies specialized in the subject, given the few academic advances regarding the subject in the Colombian metalworking sector.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

For the development of the research, a quantitative cross-sectional exploratory study was carried out with 33 metal-mechanic companies located in the department of atlantico, colombina. The instrument used was a closed survey which was applied in person and virtual (via e-mail). It should be noted that the sample used was of non-probabilistic type, characterized by the presence of the investigator's personal judgment in the element selection strategy (eleven). The selection criteria when choosing the companies for the sample were basically based on three aspects:

- SMEs (small and Medium industry) Metalmechanics duly registered
- Companies with >5 years of operation in the market
- Companies located in the Department of Atlantico, Colombia

The companies were notified prior to conducting the field investigation this process was carried out through informed consent which set the date and time of the application of the instrument, guaranteeing aspects such as the voluntariness and confidentiality of the process.

## **RESULTS**

One of the questions of the instrument focused on determining if the companies participating in the study currently have tools to identify and assess the psychosocial risk factors of work tasks and jobs; 61% of organizations gave an affirmative answer, commenting that if they have such tools, however, a high percentage of 39% denied having such a tool. The data are plotted in Fig. 1.

One of the elements that contributes to increase labor motivation in contemporary companies is the emotional salary which corresponds to the set of benefits additional to the legal wage of workers (MHSP, 2010). Employees, rather than an economic remuneration, expect a psychological remuneration that leads them to develop positive feelings about their work activities (Kompaso and Sridevi, 2010) they want to work in

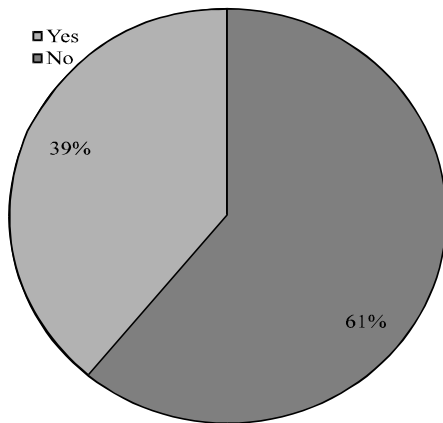


Fig. 1: Tool identification psychosocial risk factors; do the companies have tools to identify and evaluate psychosocial risk factors for work tasks and jobs?

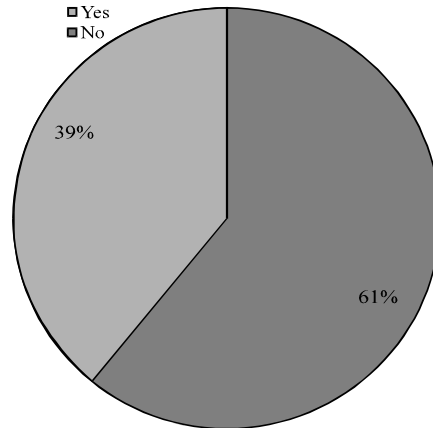


Fig. 3: Reconciliation of work/family life; does the company reconcile the work life of its employees with their family life?

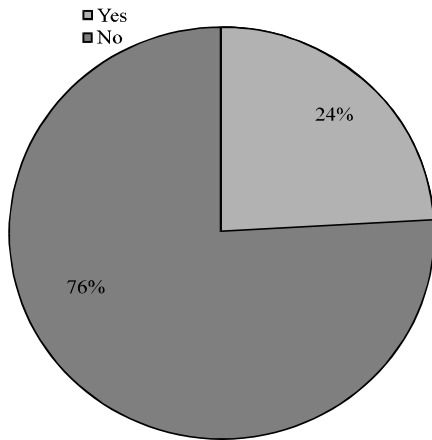


Fig. 2: Emotional wage practices; does the company conduct emotional salary practices to motivate its employees?

organizations in which they find a special sense (Ukil, 2016) where they feel valued and visualize the possibility to ascend and develop personally and professionally. Based on the above, the metalworking companies participating in the study were asked whether they currently carry out emotional salary practices the results indicate that 76% of these organizations do not and only 24% carry out this type of practice. The data are schematically shown in Fig. 2.

From the vertiginous changes in the modern world the working people have less time for leisure and to share with their loved ones. This situation is problematic as it may be the starting point for the development of intrafamilial conflicts which can generate in the worker feelings of impotence or frustration and lead to events such as divorces and family disintegrations. Intrafamilial and personal conflicts can destabilize the employee and

affect his productivity as he begins to develop anxiety and stress; therefore, it is necessary for companies to be aware of the importance of the employee having a space of interaction between their work/professional environment and family/private life (Galvez, 2005) so that in this way, the individual takes advantage of the time with loved ones and feel motivated to give their best for a company that allows them to share with their loved ones.

Participating metalworking companies were asked whether they currently reconcile the working life of their employees with their family life 61% of the respondents said that it allows for a reconciliation between these two aspects, however, the remaining 39% deny this statement, arguing that it does not carry out this process. The data shown are shown in Fig. 3.

Various investigations (Blanch, 2015; Ramirez *et al.*, 2010) and suggest that if employees feel empowered about their activities and the role they play in the company they can substantially increase their job satisfaction; on the contrary, an employee is submissive and totally subordinate to the performance of his activities, tends to be reactive, fearful in expressing his opinions and usually conceals his true potentialities; the above can cause demotivation in the employee in the east can not develop freely in a professional way which can be the starting point for problems such as depression and low self-esteem.

Metallurgical companies participating in the study were asked whether they empower their employees in the performance of their functions; 76% of respondents say that if they empower their employees, 24% say that they do not carry out this process. The data presented here are schematized in Fig. 4.

However, another aspect that can affect employee health is repetitive and monotonous activities at

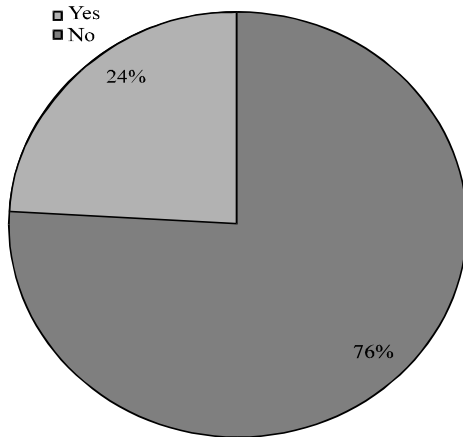


Fig. 4: Employee empowerment; do you empower your employees in relation to the development of their function?

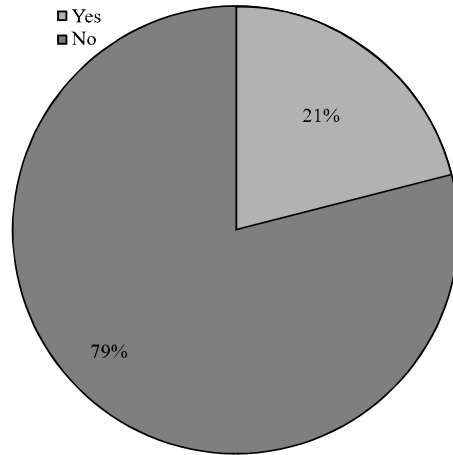


Fig. 6: Control of psychosocial factors; do you consider that when controlling psychosocial risk factors can avoid high rates of absenteeism, presentism and intentions of work abandonment?

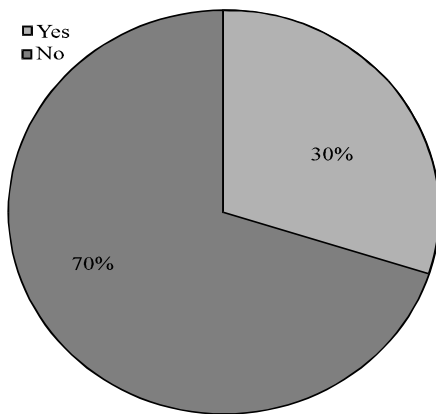


Fig. 5: Monotony and repeatability; do the activities that your employees develop have a high degree of monotony and repetitiveness?

work. These activities have a great meaning from the psychosocial point of view, since, they have an effect on the employee having little variety of tasks, few opportunities for learning, few opportunities to communicate and opinion, also perceive, monotony and with it boredom (Calderon *et al.*, 2016). These aspects can be triggers of the work stress.

The companies were asked if the activities carried out by their personnel have a high degree of monotony and repetitiveness; 70% say that the daily activities of employees are varied while the remaining 30% say that the activities carried out by their employees carry with them a high degree of monotony and repetitiveness. This information is condensed in Fig. 5.

Some companies often ignore that from the control of psychosocial risk factors can avoid high rates of

absenteeism and intentions of work abandonment; this may be due to the fact that these companies do not emphasize human management processes and focus on factors such as production and expansion in the market, thus ignoring the influence that the psychosocial factors have on their employees and the repercussion economic that absenteeism and labor turnover has on the company.

Participants were asked whether they considered that by controlling psychosocial risk factors can avoid high rates of absenteeism, presentism and intentions of work abandonment; 76% gave an affirmative answer, agreeing to agree with the question but the remaining 24% do not consider this type of controls as a fundamental aspect to avoid the rates of absenteeism and labor turnover. These data are shown in Fig. 6.

## DISCUSSION

From the results of the research, it is evident that the metalworking companies under study in general terms do not carry out sufficient and effective processes of safety and health management at work for the control of psychosocial risks such assertion is verified when only 61% of these companies have tools to identify and evaluate psychosocial risk factors in work tasks and jobs ignoring that the prevalence of exposure to psychosocial risk factors is very high, surpassing including ergonomic risk factors. It is important that these companies carry out qualified processes of identification of the evaluation and active intervention of these risk factors

(Baumgartner, 2014) through tools such as questionnaires at the intra-workplace, extra-labor and personal level, semi-structured interviews, focus groups, stress assessment instruments, among others will significantly reduce the possibilities for employees to develop psychopathologies that may affect their labor productivity, quality of life and repercussions, increasing annual turnover rates and absenteeism.

One of the strategies within SST management to reduce psychosocial risk factors corresponds to the emotional salary practices which allow the satisfaction of personal, family and professional needs of the employee, improving the quality of life of the employee and his environment (Gabcanova, 2011). However, according to the findings, only 24% of metal-mechanic companies develop these practices, i.e., 76% do not give greater importance to non-economic incentives such as professional development, safety and emotional stability, environment health work, work-family reconciliation (Puyal, 2006), among other aspects. This can have a highly negative repercussion for companies to the extent that employees will hardly be motivated by a company that is only interested in production and not the well-being and integral development of their human capital.

Although, 61% of the participating companies affirm that at the moment, they allow their employees to reconcile their work with their family life this action ends up to be superfluous to the extent that the majority of the companies do not incorporate true processes of diagnosis in related to psychosocial risk factors and also tend to ignore other support strategies aimed at the employee satisfying their physiological, safety, affiliation, recognition and self-actualization needs.

It should be noted that one of the ways to meet these two last needs "recognition and self-realization" is through the strategy of empowerment that the company uses to make the employee make their own decisions when performing their functions, fortunately, 70% of companies say they are doing this which is a positive thing, since empowerment helps employees to find greater meaning in their work and feel competent to do their job (Wahba and Bridwell, 1976).

It is highlighted that 70% of the metalworking companies state that the activities carried out by their employees are not monotonous or repetitive, however this information is not supported by a documentary base (questionnaires, interviews with employees) which can be understood as a mere estimation by these companies; Monotonous work is one of the most relevant psychosocial risks in the industry in fact has been found a direct relationship between this and the appearance of

various organic disorders physiological and psychological disorders. Hence, companies introduce preventive activities in their work safety and health programs such as active breaks, leisure time within the working day, free days for good performance among other actions.

## CONCLUSION

Industries that want to be productive and competitive in the market must recognize the importance of protecting the physical, mental and emotional integrity of their employees through effective management of safety and health at work. Based on the above, companies will not only be able to reduce the rates of absenteeism and labor turnover and therefore, the costs but motivate their employees and acquire credibility in the medium to be recognized for their corporate social responsibility.

Some industrial companies while carrying out SST programs to mitigate physical, ergonomic, biological risk factors, among others, play down the importance of "invisible" risk factors, those that permeate the mental and emotional stability of their employees, recognized in the Economic literature as psychosocial risk factors. If companies do not implement practices such as emotional salary and empowerment their employees will hardly be able to acquire a sense of belonging to their workplace which will be evidenced by low productivity rates and high rates of job dropout.

It is concluded that the metallurgical companies of the department of Atlantico participating in the study in general terms do not adequately manage the psychosocial risks, since they act under the paradigm of the manufacture without conforming to the modern paradigm of the "mind-invoice" where the worker is not worth what he produces but what he is able to create and contribute to the company through his knowledge. By acting under the paradigm of manufacturing, these companies emphasize production, leaving in the background problems such as psychosocial risk factors.

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