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WORKING CONDITIONS AND CHALLENGES OF OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY SPECIALISTS: THE CASE OF DİLOVASI

Süleyman Enes HACİBEKTAŞOĞLU*

Fatih DENİZ*

Fatih KURUTAY*

Doğukan GÖK*

Abstract

Occupational safety specialists carry out studies to prevent risks that affect the health, safety and performance of employees in workplaces. This study aims to evaluate the problems sfaced by occupational safety specialists working in Kocaeli/Dilovası. In this context, the “Scale of Problems of Occupational Safety Specialists” in the literature was applied to occupational safety specialists. The research was conducted with the data collected through face-to-face and online interviews in January, February and March of 2024, and the data were analyzed using SPSS software. 59.3% of the participants were male and 40.7% were female, and their certification levels were Class A 19.3%, Class B 24.7%, Class C 30% and technician 26%. The findings of the study reveal that occupational safety specialists face challenges such as lack of resources, insufficient employer support, limited authority and high workload in the work environment. In line with these findings, it is concluded that safety awareness and participation of employees should be increased, employers should pay more attention to Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) investments and legislation should be improved to support specialists.

Keywords: Occupational health and safety, Occupational safety specialist, Workplace issues, Questionnaire study.

*Dr. Öğr. Üyesi, Sinop Üniversitesi, İş Sağlığı ve Güvenliği Bölümü,
shacibektasoglu@sinop.edu.tr, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8997-8480>

*Dr. Öğr. Üyesi, Sinop Üniversitesi, İş Sağlığı ve Güvenliği Bölümü,
fatih.deniz@sinop.edu.tr, <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7539-5906>

*Öğrenci, Sinop Üniversitesi, İş Sağlığı ve Güvenliği Bölümü,
fatih.kurutay.6106@gmail.com, <https://orcid.org/0009-0004-1864-2156>

*Öğrenci, Sinop Üniversitesi, İş Sağlığı ve Güvenliği Bölümü, dogukan.1.gok@gmail.com,
<https://orcid.org/0009-0006-2209-3393>

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İş Güvenliği Uzmanlarının Çalışma Koşulları ve Karşılaştıkları Sorunlar: Dilovası Örneği

Öz

İş güvenliği uzmanları, işyerlerinde çalışanların sağlığını, güvenliğini ve performansını etkileyen riskleri önlemeye yönelik çalışmalar yürütmektedir. Bu araştırma, Kocaeli/Dilovası'nda görev yapan iş güvenliği uzmanlarının karşılaştıkları sorunların değerlendirilmesini amaçlamaktadır. Bu kapsamda, iş güvenliği uzmanlarına literatürde yer alan "İş Güvenliği Uzmanlarının Sorunları Ölçeği (İSGUYS)" uygulanmıştır. Araştırma, 2024 yılının Ocak, Şubat ve Mart aylarında yüz yüze ve çevrimiçi görüşmeler yoluyla toplanan verilerle gerçekleştirilmiş olup, veriler SPSS yazılımı kullanılarak analiz edilmiştir. Katılımcıların %59,3'ü erkek, %40,7'si kadın olup, sertifika düzeyleri A sınıfı %19,3, B sınıfı %24,7, C sınıfı %30 ve tekniker %26 oranında dağılım göstermektedir. Çalışmanın bulguları, iş güvenliği uzmanlarının iş ortamında kaynak eksikliği, yetersiz işveren desteği, sınırlı yetki ve yüksek iş yükü gibi zorluklarla karşılaştığını ortaya koymaktadır. Bu bulgular doğrultusunda, çalışanların güvenlik bilinci ve katılımının artırılması, işverenlerin İş Sağlığı ve Güvenliği (İSG) yatırımlarına daha fazla önem vermesi ve mevzuatın uzmanları destekleyecek şekilde geliştirilmesi gerektiği sonucuna ulaşılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İş sağlığı ve güvenliği, İş güvenliği uzmanı, İşyeri problemleri, Anket çalışması.

Introduction

In the 19th century, the unfavorable working conditions that emerged as a result of the industrial revolution and the risks posed by the constantly developing and changing structure of technology require both employers and employees to take precautions in occupational health and safety. One of the requirements of being a social state is to ensure occupational health and safety in a disciplined manner in working environments (Karakuyu ve Erdoğan, 2017). In addition to the value that industrialization adds to the country's economy, an industrialization process that does not take the necessary measures results in negativity. With industrialization, mechanization also increases, machines and robots replace people and reduce the need for manpower. Excessive mechanization has led to the emergence of some problems and negative consequences for employees who are in a productive position. Although such problems were ignored at first, they have become insurmountable over time. For this reason, there is a need to intervene and solve every problem immediately. One of the ways to be used in problem solving is to determine some

laws and rules that everyone has to follow in the workplace environment and to ensure that everyone follows these rules (Çiçek ve Öçal, 2016; Güngör & Barlas, 2019).

The rapid changes and developments in today's workplaces create new challenges in the field of occupational safety. An occupational safety specialist fulfils an important responsibility in the work environment by performing critical tasks such as protecting the health and safety of employees, preventing occupational accidents and occupational diseases, and ensuring that the workplace complies with legal regulations. Occupational safety specialists are important in all work areas for the equipment and employees in the working environment to work under much safer conditions (Cerev ve Yıldırım, 2018; Karanfil, 2023).

Occupational safety specialists play a key role in determining the measures to be taken against all kinds of hazards and risks in workplaces. As a matter of fact, with the Occupational Health and Safety Law No. 6331, they are obliged to provide consultancy and guidance to employers regarding OHS activities in workplaces. However, occupational safety specialists also face various problems in their working life, as can be encountered in every professional group (Akboğa et al., 2016; Taşkiran, 2016).

In some studies, in the literature that reveal the problems and expectations of occupational safety specialists; within the scope of the study titled "Problems Experienced by Occupational Safety Specialists" by Takaoğlu et al. firstly, general information about the occupational safety specialist profession and the powers and responsibilities of this profession is given, and then the findings of the field studies are discussed and solution suggestions are made. Identifying these problems, discussing them in detail and presenting solution suggestions represent the main purpose of this study (Takaoğlu et al., 2018). In the article by Karakaya and Sancı, the job satisfaction levels of occupational safety specialists employed in the Black Sea region were investigated. They emphasized that the job satisfaction of occupational safety specialists, who play a key role in the execution of OHS

activities in workplaces, should be at an acceptable level. As a result of the study, they determined that the job satisfaction levels of occupational safety specialists working in the Black Sea region were at a medium level (Karakaya and Sancı, 2017). In the study titled “Problems and Expectations of Occupational Safety Specialists Actively Working in Joint Health and Safety Units (JHSU): Antakya Case”, the study group consists of 49 occupational safety specialists who voluntarily participated in the study from a total of 92 specialists who have A, B and C class certificates and actively working in Antakya. The questions in the study were prepared by the researchers and collected from the participants through face-to-face interviews. The research was a questionnaire study. According to the results of the research, while the specialists stated that they have difficulty in finding a job, their job satisfaction is low and their sanction power against employers and employees is low, they expect the public supervision to increase and their remuneration to be increased and to be carried out by an independent fund instead of the employer (Karakuyu and Erdoğan, 2017).

Job satisfaction is a significant concept that determines the emotional reactions and motivation of employees towards their jobs and work environment. Happy and motivated employees increase productivity, reduce absenteeism and improve quality (Keser, 2005; Çetinkanat, 2000). Job satisfaction is shaped by internal factors, i.e. personal needs of the employee and external factors, i.e. work environment and social factors (Davis, 2004; Yıldırım, 1995). While intrinsic factors are explained by theories such as Maslow's Theory of Needs, extrinsic factors develop depending on the conditions of the work environment (Maslow, 1954; Toker, 2007). For example, fair remuneration, career opportunities and equality within the organization are extrinsic factors that directly affect job satisfaction (Davis, 2004). While low job satisfaction leads to negative consequences such as isolation, disengagement and restlessness (Karcıoğlu and Bakan, 2016), high job satisfaction increases the quality within the organization and reduces labor turnover (Erdoğan, 1996). Motivation plays a critical role in job satisfaction and directly

affects employee performance (Lawler, 1994). Job dissatisfaction, on the other hand, can lead to negative attitudes and processes that harm the business (Kahn & Morrow, 1991). As a result, job satisfaction is a vital issue for both the individual and the business and is of great importance for the sustainability of the business (Oksay, 2005). In this context, solving the problems faced by occupational safety specialists, who have important responsibilities together with employers in carrying out OHS activities in workplaces, is critical for ensuring occupational safety for an enterprise. For this reason, improving the job satisfaction of occupational safety specialists will be a correct and effective step for the decisions to be taken to ensure the safety of both the workplace and the employees.

The primary responsibility of occupational safety specialists is to investigate how working conditions can be made healthier and safer. In this way, the safety of both the employees and the people living in that environment will be ensured, and as can be understood, the occupational safety specialist profession is a profession with a high responsibility towards the employer, the employee and the society. Considering the previous studies on the problems of occupational safety specialists, it is seen that the main problems of the specialists are wages and working conditions and communication problems with other employees. The main reasons for these problems are workload, communication barriers, safety culture, technical problems, lack of experience, remuneration, sectoral expertise problems, legislation, authority, procedure, personnel shortage, stress and anxiety, employer and employee awareness, legal rights and working conditions, gender discrimination and professional independence (Arslan & Ulubeyli, 2016; Orhan, 2014; Takaoğlu et al., 2018).

In this study, a questionnaire study was conducted to observe the problems experienced by occupational safety specialists in Kocaeli / Dilovası. A negativity that occupational safety specialists may experience or a problem that may arise from them may jeopardize the health and safety of employees. For this reason, within the scope of the study, the “Challenges of Occupational Safety Specialists Scale” was

used to determine the problems experienced by occupational safety specialists, who are an important factor of OHS activities in workplaces. This study aims to reveal the problems of occupational safety specialists with this questionnaire study created by targeting occupational safety specialists. In addition, it will contribute to the literature with the help of the findings obtained. At the same time, it will provide potential individuals who will do this profession to have information about the problems they may encounter.

1. Aim of The Research

This study aims to analyze the problems of occupational safety specialists through a questionnaire study targeting occupational safety specialists working in various JHSUs and factories. In line with this purpose, our objectives are as follows:

- Identifying the problems of occupational safety specialists working in OSGBs and factories selected within the scope of the study,
- Determination of the degree of problems faced by occupational safety specialists in terms of training, financial, legal and other issues and identification of the intensity of the problem,
- Contributing to the literature with the study,
- To obtain information about what needs to change in the face of the problems emerging in the selected workplaces.

2. Methodology

2.1. Population and Sample

The population of the study consists of occupational safety specialists and technicians employed in JHSUs and factories in Kocaeli/Dilovası region. As a sample, 150 occupational safety specialists and technicians in this region were interviewed. Within the scope of the study, 29 Class A, 37 Class B, 45 Class C OHS Specialists and 39 OHS technicians were reached and a total of 150 data were obtained.

2. 2. Collection of Data

Within the scope of this study, the “Challenges of Occupational Safety Specialists Scale” was used to collect data (Aksoy and Mamatoğlu, 2019). The research data were collected through face-to-face and electronic interviews conducted by the researchers in January, February, and March of 2024. The research data were collected through a questionnaire form included in the scale. The questionnaire form consists of 2 sections. The first one consists of demographic information and the second one consists of multiple-choice questions (strongly disagree, disagree, undecided, agree, strongly agree) for the evaluation of the problems experienced by occupational safety specialists.

2. 3. Analysis of Data

Mean, standard deviation, number and percentage data were used in the evaluation of the data. Within the scope of the research, SPSS 27.0 statistical package software was used for data entry.

3. Results

In the questionnaire study carried out within the scope of this study, a total of 150 employees, 89 male and 61 female, were reached from JHSUs and factories employing occupational safety specialists in Kocaeli / Dilovası region. The questionnaire forms were filled out through face-to-face and electronic interviews with occupational safety specialists. Socio-demographic characteristics obtained from the questionnaire study are shown in Table 1. In addition, 34 questions included in the scale items were asked to evaluate the problems of occupational safety specialists.

Table 1. Socio-demographic profile of the participants

Socio-Demographic Characteristics	N	%
Gender;		
Female	61	40.7
Male	89	59.3

Age;		
18-25	47	31.3
26-40	72	48.0
41-55	24	16.0
56 ve üzeri	7	4.7
Education Status;		
Associate degree	40	26.7
Bachelor's degree	60	40.0
Post-graduate	50	33.3
Number of Children;		
Yok	90	60.0
1	31	20.7
2	22	14.7
3	5	3.3
4 and above	2	1.3
Characteristics related to work and OHS training		
Work experience;		
0-12 months	36	24.0
2-5 years	48	32.0
6-10 years	26	17.3
11-16 years	26	17.3
17-25 years	8	5.3
25 and above	6	15.4
Work accident;		
Yes	94	62.7
No	56	37.3
Near-miss situation;		
Yes	115	76.7
No	35	23.3
Certificate level of OHS specialists;		
A	29	19.3
B	37	24.7
C	45	30.0
Technician	39	26.0

When the Table 1 is analyzed, it is seen that most of the participants are C class occupational safety specialists ($n = 45$, $\% = 30$) and the gender of the participants is mostly male ($n = 89$, $\% = 59.3$). According to age, most of the participants were in the 26-40 age range ($n = 72$, $\% = 48.0$), followed by the 18-25 age range ($n = 47$, $\% = 31.3$). According to education level, most of the participants have bachelor's degree ($n = 60$, $\% = 40$), followed by master's degree ($n = 50$, $\% =$

33.3). Regarding the number of children of the participants, it is seen that most of the participants ($n = 90$, $\% = 60$) do not have children. The work experience of the participants is mostly 2-5 years ($n = 48$, $\% = 32$), followed by 0-12 months ($n = 36$, $\% = 24$). When the participants were asked about work accident experience, they answered “Yes” ($n = 94$, $\% = 62,7$) and “No” ($n = 35$, $\% = 23,3$). When asked about near miss incidents, the participants answered “Yes” ($n = 115$, $\% = 76,7$) and “No” ($n = 35$, $\% = 23,3$).

5-point Likert scale of “Strongly disagree”, “Disagree”, “Undecided”, “Agree”, “Strongly agree” was used for the participants' answers to the questionnaire items. The questions answered by the occupational safety specialists within the scope of the study are as follows:

Q1: In my workplace(s), the employer employs employees without providing them with the necessary machinery, equipment, devices, tools and equipment.

To the question Q1, 36 (24%) of the participants strongly disagree, 34 (22.7%) disagree, 23 (15.3%) partially disagree, 35 (23.3%) partially agree, 14 (9.3%) agree, 8 (5.3%) strongly agree.

Q2: In the workplace(s) I serve, the employer employs employees without providing them with appropriate Personal Protective Equipment.

Q2: 40 (26.7%) of the participants strongly disagree, 36 (24%) disagree, 17 (11.3%) partially disagree, 39 (26%) partially agree, 7 (4.7%) agree, 11 (7.3%) strongly agree.

Q:3 In the workplace(s) I serve, the employer does not take my OHS field observation and inspection reports into consideration.

To Q:3, 29 (19.3%) of the participants strongly disagree, 36 (24%) disagree, 24 (16%) partially disagree, 41 (27.3%) partially agree, 11 (7.3%) agree, 9 (6%) strongly agree.

Q:4 In the workplace(s) I serve, the employer tends to fulfil only his/her legal obligation instead of providing qualified OHS trainings.

To Q:4, 26 (17.3%) of the participants strongly disagree, 19 (12.7%) disagree, 18 (12%) partially disagree, 26 (17.3%) partially agree, 25 (16.7%) agree, 36 (24%) strongly agree.

Q5: The employer makes me feel that I should not act against him/her because he/she pays my salary.

Q5: 26 (17.3%) of the participants strongly disagree, 29 (19.3%) disagree, 9 (6%) partially disagree, 29 (19.3%) partially agree, 29 (19.3%) agree, 28 (18.7%) strongly agree.

Q6: In the workplace(s) I serve, OHS trainings are planned according to the time and place requested by the employer.

Q6: 20 (13.3%) of the participants strongly disagree, 18 (12%) disagree, 17 (11.3%) partially disagree, 30 (20%) partially agree, 42 (28%) agree, 23 (15.3%) strongly agree.

Q7: In the workplace(s) I serve, the employer does not allow me to write measures and suggestions that he/she does not want in the approved notebook.

Q7: 38 (25.3%) of the participants strongly disagree, 42 (28%) disagree, 14 (9.3%) partially disagree, 33 (22%) partially agree, 9 (6%) agree, 14 (9.3%) strongly agree.

Q8: The employer is not aware of OHS obligations in the workplace(s) I serve.

Q8: 24 (16%) of the participants strongly disagree, 42 (28%) disagree, 15 (10%) partially disagree, 38 (25.3%) partially agree, 18 (12%) agree, 13 (8.7%) strongly agree.

Q9: In the workplace(s) I serve, the employer considers the cost of Personal Protective Equipment before its ergonomic and protective features.

Q9: 16 (10.7%) of the participants strongly disagree, 25 (16.7%) disagree, 13 (8.7%) partially disagree, 26 (17.3%) partially agree, 37 (24.7%) agree, 33 (22%) strongly agree.

Q10: In the workplace(s) I serve, the employer uses the forms, instructions, procedures and plans I prepare within the scope of OHS only to fulfil the legal obligation.

Q10: 19 (12.7%) of the participants answered, “strongly disagree”, 19 (12.7%) “disagree”, 9 (6%) “somewhat disagree”, 36 (24%) “somewhat agree”, 42 (28%) “agree”, 25 (16.7%) “strongly agree”.

Q11: In the workplace(s) where I provide service, the employer ignores the suitability of the employees for the job in terms of health and safety while assigning tasks.

Q11: 28 (18.7%) of the participants strongly disagree, 32 (21.3%) disagree, 17 (11.3%) partially disagree, 38 (25.3%) partially agree, 22 (14.7%) agree, 13 (8.7%) strongly agree.

Q12: In the workplace(s) I serve, the employer sees OHS investments as unnecessary costs.

Q12: 21 (14%) of the participants strongly disagree, 22 (14.7%) disagree, 20 (13.3%) partially disagree, 42 (28%) partially agree, 32 (21.3%) agree, 13 (8.7%) strongly agree.

Q13: In the workplace(s) I serve, the employer does not take effective measures according to the risk assessment results.

Q13: 22 (14.7%) of the participants strongly disagree, 24 (16%) disagree, 24 (16%) partially disagree, 40 (26.7%) partially agree, 24 (16%) agree, 16 (10.7%) strongly agree.

Q14: In the workplace(s) where I provide service, the employer does not monitor compliance with OHS measures.

Q14: 24 (16%) of the participants strongly disagree, 31 (20.7%) disagree, 18 (12%) partially disagree, 36 (24%) partially agree, 28 (18.7%) agree, 13 (8.7%) strongly agree.

Q15: In the workplace(s) I serve, the employer considers OHS trainings as a waste of time.

Q15: 21 (14%) of the participants strongly disagree, 28 (18.7%) disagree, 19 (12.7%) partially disagree, 42 (28%) partially agree, 28 (18.7%) agree, 12 (8%) strongly agree.

Q16: Employees at the workplace(s) I serve do not participate in OHS trainings.

Q16: 26 (17,3%) of the participants strongly disagree, 47 (31.3%) disagree, 16 (10.7%) partially disagree, 41 (27.3%) partially agree, 15 (10%) agree, 5 (3.3%) strongly agree.

Q17: Employees at the workplace(s) I serve do not participate in Emergency Drills.

Q17: 24 (16%) of the participants strongly disagree, 49 (32.7%) disagree, 19 (12.7%) partially disagree, 40 (26.7%) partially agree, 12 (8%) agree, 6 (4%) strongly agree.

Q18: Employees at the workplace(s) I serve do not comply with occupational safety orders and instructions.

To Q18: 13 (8.7%) of the participants strongly disagree, 36 (24%) disagree, 21 (14%) partially disagree, 48 (32%) partially agree, 23 (15.3%) agree and 9 (6%) strongly agree.

Q19: Employees at the workplace(s) I serve consider OHS trainings as a waste of time.

To Q19: 12 (8%) of the participants strongly disagree, 29 (19.3%) disagree, 22 (14.7%) partially disagree, 39 (26%) partially agree, 36 (24%) agree, and 12 (8%) strongly agree.

Q20: In the workplace(s) I serve, employees do not ask the employer to take precautions when they encounter hazards.

To Q20: 31 (20.7%) of the participants strongly disagree, 38 (25.3%) disagree, 18 (12%) partially disagree, 31 (20.7%) partially agree, 21 (14%) agree, 11 (7.3%) strongly agree.

Q21: In the workplace(s) I serve, employees do not care about the dangerous situations and incidents they face.

To Q21: 19 (12.7%) of the participants strongly disagree, 41 (27.3%) disagree, 19 (12.7%) partially disagree, 28 (18.7%) partially agree, 31 (20.7%) agree, 12 (8%) strongly agree.

Q22: In the workplace(s) I serve, OHS measures are limited to audit periods.

To Q22: 14 (9.3%) of the participants strongly disagree, 30 (20%) disagree, 16 (10.7%) partially disagree, 43 (28.7%) partially agree, 33 (22%) agree, 14 (9.3%) strongly agree.

Q23: OHS legislation updates are difficult to follow.

To Q23: 16 (10.7%) of the participants strongly disagree, 42 (28%) disagree, 14 (9.3%) partially disagree, 48 (32%) partially agree, 16 (10.7%) agree, 14 (9.3%) strongly agree.

Q24: OHS legislation is difficult to understand.

To Q24: 14 (9.3%) of the participants strongly disagree, 62 (41.3%) disagree, 23 (15.3%) partially disagree, 35 (23.3%) partially agree, 6 (4%) agree, 10 (6.7%) strongly agree.

Q25: OHS legislation is difficult to fully implement because it is too detailed.

To Q25: 20 (13.3%) of the participants strongly disagree, 46 (30.7%) disagree, 17 (11.3%) partially disagree, 40 (26.7%) partially agree, 13 (8.7%) agree, 14 (9.3%) strongly agree.

Q26: The OHS law places the implementation of the law largely on the Occupational Safety Specialist.

To Q26: 11 (7.3%) of the participants strongly disagree, 15 (10%) disagree, 14 (9.3%) partially disagree, 15 (10%) partially agree, 43 (28.7%) agree, 52 (34.7%) strongly agree.

Q27: The OHS Law is insufficient to ensure the psychological well-being of employees at the workplace.

To Q27: 9 (6%) of the participants strongly disagree, 19 (12.7%) disagree, 13 (8.7%) partially disagree, 36 (24%) partially agree, 46 (30.7%) agree, 27 (18%) strongly agree.

Q28: The OHS Law's emphasis on technical measures is insufficient to prevent accidents.

To Q28: 10 (6.7%) of the participants strongly disagree, 29 (19.3%) disagree, 30 (20%) partially disagree, 28 (18.7%) partially agree, 34 (22.7%) agree, 19 (12.7%) strongly agree.

Q29: Career opportunities are limited in my position.

To Q29: 7 (4.7%) of the participants strongly disagree, 41 (27.3%) disagree, 16 (10.7%) partially disagree, 29 (19.3%) partially agree, 39 (26%) agree, 18 (12%) strongly agree.

Q30: My salary is insufficient for the risk I take.

Q30: 2 (1.3%) of the participants strongly disagree, 10 (6.7%) disagree, 5 (3.3%) partially disagree, 23 (15.3%) partially agree, 37 (24.7%) agree, 73 (48.7%) strongly agree.

Q31: Being appreciated at the end of my achievements in my job.

To Q31: 12 (8%) of the participants strongly disagree, 23 (15.3%) disagree, 18 (12%) partially disagree, 40 (26.7%) partially agree, 34 (22.7%) agree, 23 (15.3%) strongly agree.

Q32: My powers as an Occupational Safety Specialist are limited.

Q32: 8 (5.3%) of the participants strongly disagree, 13 (8.7%) disagree, 14 (9.3%) partially disagree, 38 (25.3%) partially agree, 41 (27.3%) agree, 36 (24%) strongly agree.

Q33: The duties and responsibilities imposed on me as an Occupational Safety Specialist are high.

Q33: 4 (2.7%) of the participants strongly disagree, 11 (7.3%) disagree, 9 (6%) partially disagree, 27 (18%) partially agree, 46 (30.7%) agree, 53 (35.3%) strongly agree.

Q34: When a work accident occurs, I know that I will be seen as one of the main culprits.

To Q34: 10 (6.7%) of the participants strongly disagree, 13 (8.7%) disagree, 6 (4%) partially disagree, 25 (16.7%) partially agree, 43 (28.7%) agree, 53 (35.3%) strongly agree.

According to these findings, based on the opinions of occupational safety specialists, the main problems they face in their work environments can be summarized as follows:

✓ *Lack of Necessary Equipment and Resources*

Machinery and Tools: 47.9% of specialists say that employers do not provide the necessary machinery, tools and equipment. This lack of resources is an issue that can negatively impact safe practices. While some respondents disagreed that employers do not provide Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), around 38% agreed or strongly agreed. This suggests that there may be inconsistency in the provision or quality of PPE.

✓ *Insufficient Attention to OHS Observations and Recommendations*

40.6% of respondents think that employers do not take OHS observation reports seriously. This indicates a lack of respect for the recommendations of OHS specialists and a gap in safety management.

✓ *Minimal OHS Training Efforts and Legal Compliance Mindset*

It is observed that most employers (40.7%) only fulfil the minimum legal requirements instead of providing quality OHS training. The fact that OHS trainings are planned at the time and place requested by the employer shows that the trainings are not organized in accordance with the needs of the employees.

✓ *Pressures in Employer-Employee Relations*

38% of respondents said they felt they should not stand up to their employers due to salary dependency. This reveals the power dynamics that limit the ability of OHS professionals to push safety standards. The 28% of respondents who stated that

they were restricted in writing the measures that the employer did not want in OHS records indicate that the employer influences OHS records.

✓ *Employer Attitudes and Perceptions of OHS Costs*

34.6% of specialists state that employers see OHS investments as unnecessary costs. This shows that budgetary concerns are effective in prioritizing safety. The fact that employers consider the cost of PPE rather than its ergonomic and protective features reveals that safety can be sacrificed to the budget.

✓ *Lack of Effective Measures Based on Risk Assessment*

26.7% of respondents state that employers do not take effective measures based on risk assessment findings. This suggests that risk assessments are superficial or not supported by adequate measures.

✓ *Employee Engagement and Compliance Issues*

It is reported that 40.6% of employees do not attend OHS trainings and 30.7% show low participation in emergency drills. Compliance with safety instructions is also a problem, with 53.3% stating that employees ignore safety precautions.

✓ *Complexity and Inadequacy of Legislation*

Most specialists find it difficult to fully implement OHS legislation due to its detail and complexity. 34.7% of respondents said that the law places the burden largely on OHS professionals. This can lead to workload and responsibility problems. The technical focus of the legislation is insufficient to prevent accidents; 31.4% think that this technical focus is not sufficient in terms of practical safety.

✓ *Psychological Burden and Job Insecurity*

53.3% of specialists state that their duties and responsibilities are high, but career development and recognition are insufficient. 52% of specialists worry that they will be blamed when work accidents occur. This reveals the fear of scapegoating specialists in times of crisis.

✓ *Low Compensation for High-Risk Positions*

Salary concerns are widespread. 48.7% of respondents believe that their salaries are not commensurate with the risks they undertake. This shows that the risky and intensive work of specialists is not adequately compensated by their salaries.

In general, occupational safety professionals face many challenges, including lack of resources, lack of employer support, limited authority, high workload, and low worker engagement in safety. Addressing these challenges requires organizations to embrace OHS more deeply, while also requiring changes in legislation to support professionals.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

This study examines the challenges faced by occupational safety specialists working in businesses located in the Kocaeli/Dilovası region and proposes solutions to address these issues. The research was conducted through a series of survey questions that collected demographic data and identified specific difficulties encountered by these specialists. The data obtained were analyzed using SPSS statistical software. According to the survey results, the challenges experienced by occupational safety specialists can be categorized under several main themes.

The analysis of the study data revealed that the salaries and other financial rights of occupational safety specialists do not meet their expectations. Specialists stated that they are underpaid compared to the difficulty and responsibility of their work. In the study, specialists stated that they had difficulties due to the complexity and constant updating of legal regulations. In addition, difficulties with employers in fulfilling legal requirements in workplaces also appear to be an important problem. The heavy workload and high stress levels of occupational safety specialists negatively affect their working conditions. Specialists stated that they work under great pressure due to the lack of a safety culture in workplaces and the insensitivity of employers on this issue. Occupational safety specialists stated that they have difficulty in communicating effectively with other employees and employers in their

workplaces and that this situation negatively affects the implementation and sustainability of safety measures.

Strengthening training programs for occupational safety specialists is of great importance. These programs should be structured to increase their theoretical knowledge as well as to allow them to practice in the field. Furthermore, the financial rights of occupational safety specialists need to be improved; their salaries and other benefits should be aligned with the challenges and responsibilities of the job. In addition, financial incentives and rewards offered to specialists will play an important role in increasing their motivation.

Legal regulations on occupational health and safety should be made more understandable and applicable, and specialists should be continuously informed and supported on these regulations. More occupational safety specialists should be employed in order to distribute the workload evenly and prevent excessive workload. Various trainings and events should be organized to ensure effective communication and cooperation in the workplace, and occupational safety specialists should be equipped with the necessary skills to communicate better with other employees and employers.

Finally, psychosocial support programs should be established to prevent occupational safety specialists from working under high stress and pressure. These programs will support them to cope with the challenges they face in the workplace and maintain their psychological health.

This study was conducted to identify the problems faced by occupational safety specialists and to offer solutions to these problems. Future research can make the study more comprehensive by examining the problems faced by occupational safety specialists in different regions and the regional differences of these problems. In addition, the field can be deepened by investigating the difficulties faced by occupational safety specialists working in different sectors and sector-specific solutions to these difficulties.

Analyzing the problems experienced by occupational safety specialists in detail according to their specialization classes will contribute to the development of solutions suitable for each level of specialization. At the same time, research on the process of disseminating occupational safety culture in workplaces and the role of occupational safety specialists in this process can increase the effectiveness of occupational safety practices. Studies examining the long-term effects of the problems faced by specialists and how these effects can be minimized will also make an important contribution to the field.

In conclusion, the solution to the problems experienced by occupational safety specialists is a critical issue that needs to be addressed not only at the individual level but also at the institutional and societal level. It is anticipated that this study will make a significant contribution to the literature to better understand the difficulties faced by occupational safety specialists and to develop solutions to these difficulties. With more comprehensive and detailed research to be conducted in the future, the working conditions of occupational safety specialists and their impact on occupational health and safety can be further improved.

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