

Occupational Accident Statistics in Bangladesh: Reality, problems and challenges

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Numbers of Workplace deaths and injuries in Bangladesh

There exist three sources of figures on the number of workplace deaths and injuries in Bangladesh: Government data which is based on employer reports; reports published in newspapers; and estimates by the ILO. None of these can be relied on to provide accurate data.

Legal reporting Requirements: Bangladesh Labour Act, 2006 required factory occupiersto report deaths, injuries and diseases to the Inspectorate of Factories.

The data for 2005 and 2009 is set out below.

: Deaths and injuries reported to the Inspectorate of Factories

| | <i>Deaths</i> | <i>Serious</i> | <i>Minor injuries</i> |
|-------------|---------------|----------------|-----------------------|
| <i>2005</i> | 106 | 285 | 1136 |
| <i>2006</i> | 104 | 298 | 995 |
| <i>2007</i> | Not available | Not available | Not available |
| <i>2008</i> | Not available | Not available | Not available |
| <i>2009</i> | Not available | Not available | Not available |

With the enactment of the BLA 2006, the reporting requirements extended beyond factories to a wider range of establishments – including construction sites, factories employing more than 5 workers, and agricultural farms employing more than 10 workers - and the obligation was imposed upon ‘employers’ rather than ‘occupiers’.

The Inspectorate of Factories and Establishment does not, at the time of finalizing this report, have any figures for these three years.¹

It is common in many countries, for government reporting systems – like the one in the BLA 2006 - to obtain only partial information on the numbers of workplace injuries.²

There has been no research done on under-reporting in Bangladesh, however it is safe to assume that the lack of reporting is likely to be even greater in Bangladesh than in countries like the USA.

Three factors are likely to justify this assertion:

- high levels of lack of knowledge by employers of their reporting obligations;
- fear of consequences if incidents are reported;³
- and lack of any consequences when incidents are not in fact reported.

Monitoring Workplace Death and Injury in Bangladesh: Experience of OSHE

News paper based monitoring:

National News paper and local news papers are other source of collecting information on workplace accidents, death and injury of workers. But the limitation is, it only covers news of big accidents followed by death and critical injury.

Since 2005 OSHE has been engaged on workplace death and injury monitoring of 16 national daily newspapers and sharing the finding with government, trade unions, employers and other stake holders. In early 2010, AMRC came up with some financial assistance to strengthening this important national work.

Existing monitoring methodology: (a) identify and marking the accident report published in the newspaper on day to day basis (b) entry the identified accident data (sector, nature of accident, death and injury) by using SPSS programme (c) publish periodic fact sheet and finding report (3 months, 6 months and yearly) (d) disseminate the finding to print and electronic media, OSHE news letter to different stake holders.

¹ Oral Communication with Inspectorate of Factories.

² See: “Incidents Reported to the Health and Safety Executive: Lack of Investigation, 2001-7” Unite (2008), see p.2, <http://www.corporateaccountability.org/dl/HSE/investig/unite.pdf>

³ This is referring more to fear of possible extortion by the authorities, than actual formal enforcement action

Accident Data
Period: Year 2005-2009

| Year | Killed | Injured | Total |
|--------------|---------------|----------------|--------------|
| 2005 | 289 | 1006 | 1295 |
| 2006 | 772 | 4453 | 5225 |
| 2007 | 1768 | 1782 | 3550 |
| 2008 | 1793 | 2684 | 4477 |
| 2009 | 1639 | 1858 | 3497 |
| Total | | | 18044 |

Al though there is a question on official acceptability such news paper based statistics. But still it considered as good reference point to understand current situation under the condition non-availability of workplace accident data from responsible government source.

It should be noted that some of the deaths reported in the newspapers would have been outside the formal reporting requirements under the BLA 2006 (i.e. as the deaths took place in factories will less than five employees, or the workers were self-employed).

There are obvious problems with relying on newspaper reports. The reporting is unlikely to be comprehensive – and will be heavily biased towards workplace deaths that take place in urban areas where journalists are located. In addition, there will be many workers, reported in the papers to have only suffered serious injuries, will have subsequently died – but the subsequent death will not have been reported in the papers.

However, research in Pakistan suggested that newspaper reports more injury-related events than police reports.⁴

The monitoring could be more effective if a standard monitoring guideline and special data entry soft were is developed for this special purpose.

Recommendations:

- (a) Initiate campaign towards enforce workplace accident reporting obligation.
- (b) Raising awareness among workers, trade unions and employers on this matter.
- (c) To develop standard guideline, quality data management toos (i.e. special software) for news paper based monitoring <as alternative source of having workplace accident statistics.

⁴ Ghaffar, A, Hyder, A and Bishai, D, “Newspaper reports as a source for injury data in developing countries” (2001), Health Policy and Planning 16(3), 322-325

- (d) To extend monitoring work at tertiary level of public hospitals at industrial areas on workers come with workplace accident and injury.
- (e) To conduct in-depth accident investigation, provide legal services to victims for obtaining legal compensation.
- (f) Engagement with Public Interest Litigation (PIL) at the upper court with seeking a order pass to the government to ensure enforcement of accident reporting obligation at enterprise level.