

Unravelling the Working Conditions and their Effect on the Health of Workers in the Fired Brick Manufacturing Industries in the Vhembe District, Limpopo Province of South Africa

By

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in

Sociology

At the

University of Venda

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2014

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The purpose of the study was to determine whether working conditions in the fired brick kiln are related to workers' health outcomes.

Design and setting: A concurrent triangulation design was used in this cross-sectional study. Stratified sampling was used, and this entailed dividing the population into subgroups such as gender, age and location. Two hundred (200) respondents were selected from a sampling frame of more than five hundred (500) brick kiln workers. Some literate respondents completed the questionnaires, whilst key informational groups comprised of illiterate workers, union shop-stewards, health and safety workers, as well as management personnel were interviewed. Data were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21.

Results: The findings confirmed that the fired brick kiln sector remains a threat to the physical health and safety of the workers. Many workers experienced neck, upper back, shoulder and hand pain, as well as breathing difficulties or chest pains. The surveyed companies had an average monthly sickness related absenteeism of twenty six percent (26%). Significant interactions were found for the combinations of physical working conditions, and hazardous exposure to work environment risk factors among workers ($p < 0.05$).

Conclusion: Safety in the workplace represented a shared interest with outcomes that benefit both labour and management. Working conditions should, therefore, support workers in their varying places of work; and workers should have some say in the design of work stations. Attention to worksites with poor safety records should be paid, and safety in collective bargaining should be prioritised.