

Gender Sensitive Occupational Health & Safety

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Since the introduction of the SRSC regs 1977, we have seen changes to the UK labour market;

Decline of manufacturing, mushrooming growth of the service sector and globalisation.



Changes to the work force

Women make up almost half of the workforce, greater ethnic and religious diversity, significant numbers of disabled workers and temporary / agency workers.



Sex or Gender

Sex

- Biological differences between men and women e.g. childbearing

Gender

- Social differences between men and women e.g. childrearing



Sex differences

Reproductive system/ function, hormones, immune system, metabolism, body fat, musculo-skeletal characteristics , response to exercise and thermal stress.



Gender differences

Jobs, occupations and tasks within jobs
Employment patterns, working hours/shifts
Work loads (work/home)
Social role & expectations



Ways of treating gender within OHS

- Gender stereotyping
- Gender 'neutral'
- Gender sensitive



Gender stereo-typing

'women's work is light work'
'stress is for wimps'
'manual and white collar jobs'
'it must be that time of the month'
'it's your age'



Gender stereo-typing

These can lead to false assumptions about who is or is not at risk in the workplace.
Opportunities for prevention can be overlooked as a result.



Health & Safety Law in the UK covers all workers, but mainly it does not distinguish between women's and men's job's.
Currently we have a 'gender neutral system'.



Design of work, its organisation and equipment are often based on the model of the 'average' man

This can lead to discrimination against women in a number of ways



- Ergonomically
- Muscle strength
- Manual handling
- Chemical exposure
- PPE



Everyone has an equal right to protection from harm at work but that doesn't mean treating everyone as if they were the same!



The Problem

- Hazards in women's work underestimated.
- Sex & gender factors affecting working men are often not considered,
- Sex & gender not always taken into account in H&S studies
- Prevention poorly targeted



A gender sensitive approach to H&S will improve prevention for both women & men and ensure everyone is equally protected.



Promoting gender sensitivity in OSH

- A practical tool for safety reps
- Union representation/involvement
- Improved data collection / analysis
- Improved prevention for women & men



G&OSH checklist

1. Workplace agreement / policy
2. Union policy
3. OSH management
4. Safety / equality reps
5. Risk assessment / prevention
6. Sickness absence management / investigation
7. Reporting / monitoring
8. Other issues?



What can you do?

- Improve recognition & understanding of the issues facing women & men in the workplace.
- Involve more women in H&S consultation.
- Ensure policies and practices are gender sensitive.
- Make work fit for all workers

- Consultation, Inclusion, Visibility



Guidance

The TUC has reconvened the G&OSH group.
Information can be found at

www.tuc.org.uk

www.hazards.org

www.unitetheunion.com

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Thank you

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