

## Quality of working conditions in rural areas on the example of small wood processing plants - chosen aspects

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**Abstract:** Working in wood processing plants poses a relatively high level of professional risk. Health threat and threat to employees' private life are mainly derived from the difficult working environment, contact with dangerous equipment and machines, improper organization of work, lack of full mechanization of machining operations and occurrence of harmful impregnating agents, preservatives and retardants. This profession is mentioned among the occupations characterized by a comparatively high level of accidents amongst all sectors of national economy. The paper presents the most important aspects of the study.

*Keywords:* sawmill industry, physical working conditions, rural areas

### OBJECTIVE, METHOD AND SCOPE OF STUDY

The main objective of the study was to identify the quality of working conditions in the opinion of employees and employers of the sawmill industry in the rural areas of Opole Voivodeship.

The study was performed in 5 small companies from the wood processing industry in the district of Opole. A total number of employees is 95, including 15 managers or foremen. 80 employees form the first group and 12 employees from the second group took part in the study. The study was performed in July 2015.

The questionnaire contained 25 questions, which were related to issues connected with motivation to undertake the job in the analyzed company and its characteristics, activities connected to compliance with safety rules and their usefulness, issues related to the assessment of the physical working conditions and the opinion of respondents on the conditions of employment and interpersonal relationships in the workplace. At the end of the survey, the researchers wanted also to know the views of respondents on working conditions in general.

### ANALYSIS OF THE RESULTS

#### Place of work and its characteristics

One of the important elements affecting the quality of working conditions is the reason to choose the particular job by employees. When choosing job, people are guided by different factors. The most important of them are presented in the table below.

**Table 1** Reasons of choosing job in the surveyed plants declared by the employees

Question 1	Why did you undertake job in the timber industry?	Surveyed companies
a)	it is in line with my education	34,8%
b)	it takes account of my education	27,1%
c)	it is the only plant near the place where i live	71,7%
d)	it gives the opportunity to develop	15,7%
e)	it gives the opportunity of employment	81,5%
f)	it gives the opportunity of high earnings	11,9%
g)	other reasons	-

Source: Own calculations based on surveys. It was possible to choose more than one answer.

The decision to accept a job in the analyzed company was influenced mainly by the fact of having a job in general and the proximity of the company near the place of residence. For 1/3 of respondents, a great significance was the fact that it is a work in line with their qualifications and education. From the received information, it seems that the employees did not accept a job because of the possibility of achieving high earnings and professional development. The reason for this may be that the surveyed companies are located in small towns where it is much more difficult to find a job than in urban areas or more industrialized ones.

**Table 2** Type of preparation, job type and its characteristics

	Specification	Surveyed companies
	Question.2 What kind of work do you do?	
a)	manual system (man – tool - material)	68,8%
b)	mechanized system (man – machine - material)	31,2%
c)	automated system	-
	Question 3 Do you work in a shift system	
a)	yes	-
b)	no	100%
	Question. 4 Do you think that machines and devices on which you are working is complicated?	
a)	yes	33,0%
b)	no	67,0%
	Question. 5 Would you be so kind to specify the nature of your work?	
a)	onerous and tiring work	45,0%
b)	monotonous work	50,0%
c)	light work	5,0%
	Question 6 Would you be so kind to specify what is required of you in your workplace? (it was possible to give more than one answer)	
a)	physical effort	62,4%
b)	mental effort	31,2 %
c)	manual dexterity	50,0%

Source: Own calculations based on surveys.

While making the characteristics of the work type and position of the employee in the production process, it can be assumed that the respondents mainly operate using simple and complex tools. Employees work in the single-shift system, with the exception when the orders are higher than planned. Then, additional temporary workers are employed on specific-task contract or mandatory contract and the staff works on two shifts, which happens on average twice a year. If the degree of difficulty in the use of machinery and equipment is specified, 2/3 of respondents believe that it is negligible. Moreover, during the analyzing the surveys, it was noted that the work mainly requires from the employees, a physical effort and at the same time, work is arduous and monotonous.

### **Activities in the field of occupational health and safety and its usefulness**

In the investigated company, employees and their supervisors accordingly confirmed that they were provided with the induction trainings. Unfortunately, in the field of periodic trainings, situation is not so obvious, as workers opinions do not coincide with the replies of supervisors. According to the supervisors (100%) all employees are undergoing periodic trainings. This opinion, however, confirms only every third employee.

Moreover, based on questions related to activities undertaken in the field of occupational health and safety and its usefulness, it can be also observed that as stated by the majority of respondents (opinion of all surveyed supervisors and 77,5% of employees) occupational health

and safety training can contribute to reduce the number of accidents at work. Unfortunately, every fourth employee confessed to violating health and safety rules. Supervisors noticed this problem as well, admitting lack of consistent response in this matter from their side. Interestingly, almost all respondents believed that penalties should be imposed on employees who infringe safety regulations, since their lack, as it occurs in this particular company, does not activate anyone to change the behavior. Respondents' opinion on abiding working hours is a positive phenomenon - all respondents answered positively. The majority of respondents (81.3% of employees, 91.6% superiors) declared abiding the working hours.

### **Accident threats, factors affecting poor quality of working conditions and use of personal protective equipment**

Analyzing the question related to the reasons of accident risks in the workplace it can be concluded that the respondents mostly agree as to the causes of accident risks in the workplace. The most common answers were:

- negligence and irresponsibility of employees (opinion of 65,0% workers - 100% supervisors),
- inefficient machinery and equipment (opinion of 82,5% workers - 100% supervisors),
- overwork of employees (opinion 60% of workers and supervisors),
- stress and family problems (opinion of 47,5% employees, 58,3% supervisors).

Respondents had significantly different opinion on compliance with health and safety regulations. All supervisors are unanimous on the fact that the employees break the basic rules of safety, which is reflected, in the number of workplace accidents. However, the same opinion is shared only by 1/3 of the employees. The others believe that violating health and safety rules is insignificant and they do not pay that much attention to this issue, as they bear no serious consequence in this matter. Other factors (e.g. work in the evening hours, improper pace of work and lack of communication) in the opinion of all respondents play a minor role. It should be noted that the high rate of factors directly attributable to the employees is not contingent upon the size of the company. It consists of many factors, among which one could list fast pace of life and lack of employees professional approach to their duties.

**Table 3** The structure of factors affecting the quality of working conditions

<b>Question 15</b>	What in your opinion affects the poor quality of working conditions	<b>employees</b>	<b>supervisors</b>
a)	work environment (such as excessive noise, the presence of preservatives)	58,8%	66,6%
b)	work organization	25,0%	8,3
c)	machinery park	43,8%	-
d)	remuneration	81,3%	16,6%
e)	interpersonal relationships on the line employee - superior	23,8%	8,3%
f)	providing personal protection equipment	18,8%	16,6%
g)	employees training	15,0%	33,3%

source: Own calculations based on surveys. It was possible to choose more than one answer.

Considering the responses to the questions that would allow identifying determinants of poor working conditions in the surveyed company it may be concluded that according to superiors these are mainly factors associated with a specific work environment occurring in wood processing industry and the limited opportunities for upgrading skills by staff. Other factors are at the appropriate level or slightly deviate from the generally accepted standards. The workers' opinions overlap only in relation to work environment issues. However, a the most respondents believe that their salary is too low. In addition, 2/5 of employees believe that machinery park and tools do not meet health and safety rules. Other factors, though to a lesser extent, appear in the surveyed companies too.

Employer's provision of personal protective equipment and at the same time using it by the employees play an important role, since it reduces significantly the risk of work accident. Unfortunately, the analysis of the responses clearly indicates that a considerable percentage of respondents is not aware of necessity to use personal protective equipment - every fourth worker pointed "I DO NOT KNOW" to the question "Is it necessary to use personal protective equipment at your workplace?". This may indicate lack of information in this subject provided by the management team or unprofessional approach to the workplace by the workers, who often undergo appropriate training; however, they disregard it and do not pay much attention. This is also confirmed by answers to the questions shown in Table 4. While analyzing them, it can be said that 1/5 of employees have no idea whether the employer provides the necessary personal protective equipment. However, only 2/5 of the respondents declared to apply them systematically. What is even more interesting is the fact that not every third supervisor knows whether their subordinates work in accordance with applicable health and safety rules. This attitude undoubtedly fosters misconduct of employees. Therefore, it can be concluded that the use of personal protective equipment, as well as management awareness in this subject is low, which in turn is reflected in increase of occupational risk.

**Table 4. The frequency of applicability of PPE by employees**

Does the employer provide adequate personal protective equipment?						
Employees			Supervisors			
Yes	no	Do not know	Yes	No	Do not know	
66,6%	11,1%	22,3%	91,6%	8,4%	-	
Do you use personal protective equipment?			Do the employees use personal protective equipment?			
Yes, always	Yes, often	No, never	Yes, always	Yes, often	No, never	Don't know
40,0%	45,0%	15,0%	33,4,0%	33,3%	-	33,3%

source: Own calculations based on surveys.

### Conditions of employment, interpersonal relations

Employment contract type and remuneration issue are strongly influenced by the level of economic working conditions and thus they affect the assessment of working conditions in general. In the analyzed company 3/4 of employees are not satisfied with the type of contracts they have. The majority are the contracts for an indefinite time (opinion of 68,8% of employees) with the salary not exceeding 3.000 PLN gross (opinion of 81,3% of employees) The opinion of supervisors is quite different in this regard. As stated by the supervisors, the employees receive adequate remuneration, consistent with their education level, qualifications and skills (opinion of 75% of supervisors).

The aim of another question was to learn about respondents' opinion in relation to interpersonal relations in their company. None of the respondents considers the interpersonal relations as excellent. Most of the employees and supervisors identified them as positive (almost 66,3% of employees and 75% supervisors). The employees have the divergent opinion concerning the answer, which suggests an extremely low level of interpersonal relations. Every fifth employee expressed such an opinion, but employers did not notice any irregularities in this regard.

**Table 5. Overall assessment of working conditions in the opinion of employees and their supervisors**

specification	workers	supervisors
excellent	-	-
very good	-	40%
good	42,5%	60%
satisfactory	37,5%	-
bad	20,0%	-

source: Own calculations based on surveys.

The last question in the questionnaire was supposed to assess overall evaluation of the working conditions. While analyzing obtained data, it can be concluded that the opinion of employees is far from the view of their supervisors, who evaluate working conditions on a high level. Whereas 1/5 respondents working physically consider them simply as derogatory and undignified.

#### SUMMARY

The research allowed collecting relevant information upon which an analysis and conclusions were made on the quality of working conditions of small wood processing plants in rural areas Opole province.

The views expressed in the survey clearly show that employees opinion on most issues relating to working conditions significantly differ from the opinion of supervisors. Moreover, the analysis shows that employees are not fully aware of the factors determining the quality of the work environment, and often their misconduct lowers the overall quality of working conditions. Unfortunately, as indicated by the results, it happens with a tacit consent of supervisors. Therefore, considering the opinions of all respondents, it can be concluded that the overall quality of working conditions in the studied plants is at an average level.

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**Streszczenie:** *Jakość warunków pracy na obszarach wiejskich na przykładzie małych zakładów przerobu drewna – wybrane aspekty.* Praca w zakładach przerobu drewna obarczona jest stosunkowo dużym ryzykiem zawodowym. Zagrożenia zdrowia i życia pracowników mają źródło przede wszystkim w niełatwym środowisku pracy, kontakcie z niebezpiecznymi urządzeniami i maszynami, niewłaściwej organizacji pracy, braku pełnego zmechanizowania operacji obróbczych oraz występowaniu szkodliwych dla zdrowia środków impregnujących, konserwujących i przeciwpalnych. Pracowników obróbki drewna wymienia się wśród zawodów charakteryzujących się względnie wysokim stopniem wypadkowości wśród wszystkich gałęzi przemysłu w Polsce. W opracowaniu przedstawiono najważniejsze aspekty z przeprowadzonych badań.

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