

Occupational Health Psychology Union Report

The Occupational Health Psychology Program

Occupational Health Psychology (OHP) is a relatively new field dedicated to promoting, maintaining, and improving physical, psychological, emotional, and mental health and well-being at work.

The OHP program at the University of Houston is an inter-departmental endeavor that draws on the knowledge of experts from the Departments of Psychology, Management, Industrial Engineering, and School of Law. Between April and July 2002, the Department of Psychology conducted a curriculum development survey intended to capture concerns of Houston-area unions; its purpose was to compare and contrast areas of union interest with the OHP program curriculum. As a participant on this survey, we are providing you with this report summarizing the results of the survey.

Overview of Report

This report is presented in two sections. The first section addresses general background information regarding the participants and survey methodology. The second section addresses results of the union survey and includes three components: a) the extent of union concern for various OHP-related issues, including top union concerns, b) the extent to which unions provide OHP-related services and programs to members, and c) union-management effort, including which aspects of the work environment (e.g., wages) were attributed to union, management, or joint effort. Within each section, industry differences are presented.

Section I – Participants and Methodology

Participants

Union surveys were mailed to a sample of union local presidents. The contact list came from the AFL-CIO and included all union local presidents in the Houston metropolitan area. Of the 78 unions invited to participate, 27 surveys were completed for a response rate of 35%. Two union surveys were returned due to incorrect or incomplete addresses.

The union sample consisted of eight industries: 37% goods producing, 15% construction, 15% energy, 11% service, 7% government, 7% professional, 4% education, and 4% medical. The median union size was 1,337 members. Unions were equally likely to represent members that worked for the same employer (44%) as members that worked for multiple employers (52%); however, most unions (85%) represented members that worked at multiple locations.

Measures

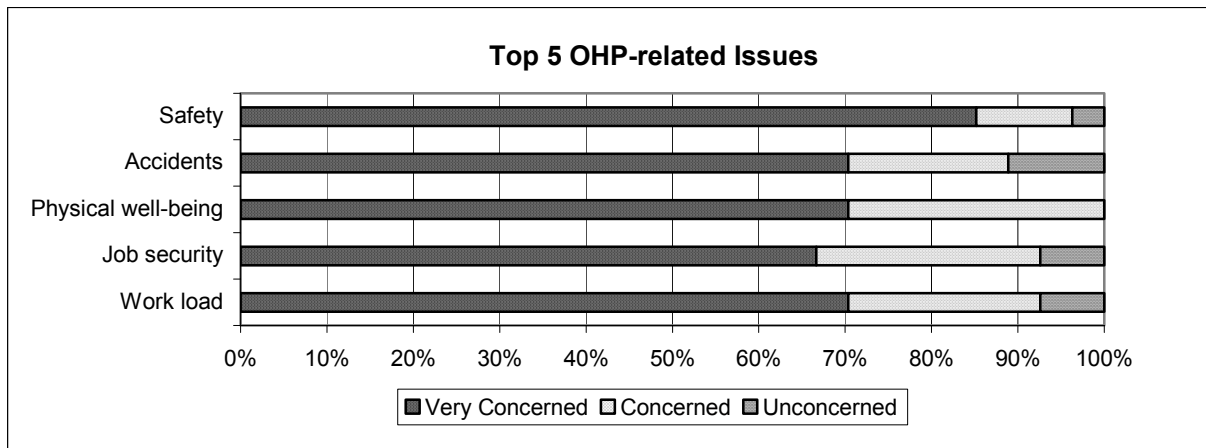
A survey was created to assess union interest and involvement in OHP-related issues. The survey required participants to rate the extent to which his/her local was concerned with various OHP-related issues on a 6-point Likert-type scale (from 'not at all' to 'a very great extent'). In

addition, the survey assessed the number of OHP-related services and programs offered by the union, the extent to which participants believed that management or union effort contributed to the attainment of various aspects of the environment, and the extent to which the union was interested in collaboration with the University of Houston.

Section II - Results

Part A: Union Concerns

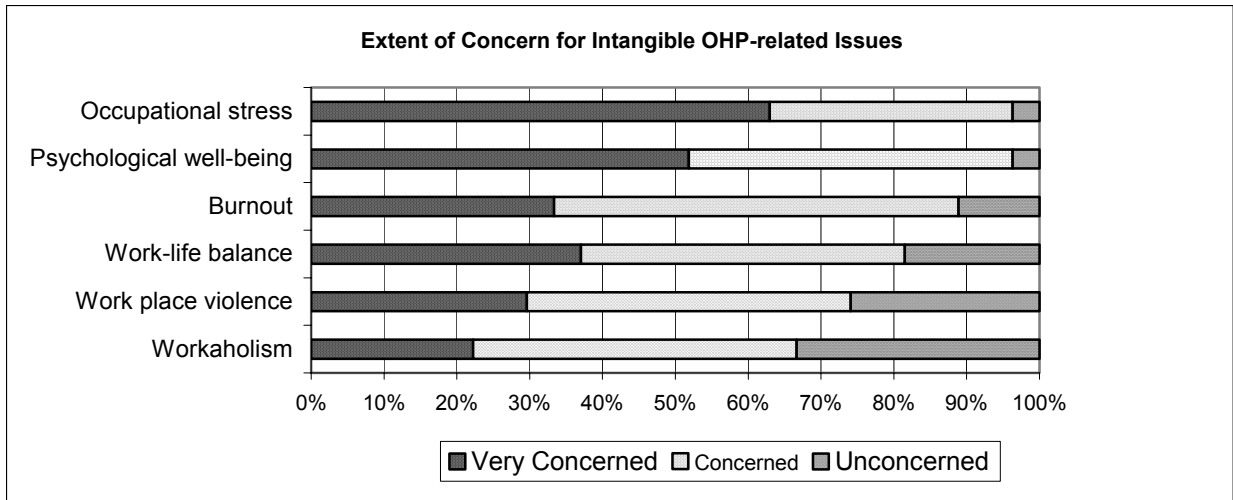
Appendix A displays the average extent of concern with all OHP-related issues and Appendix B displays the frequency of responses for all OHP-related issues; OHP-related issues are listed in descending order. The chart presented below displays the top five OHP-related issues among all respondents. As shown below, an overwhelming majority of union presidents indicated that they were very concerned about issues relating to physical health and well-being of members; three of the top five OHP-related issues (safety, accidents, and physical well-being) were identified as relating to tangible aspects of the job. In fact, only 1 participant (4% of the sample) reported that his/her union was 'unconcerned' with safety issues, and only 3 participants (11% of the sample) reported that their union was 'unconcerned' with accidents.



As might be expected, the top five OHP-related issues were different as a function of industry. Unions representing the construction, energy, government, good producing, and medical industries reported the greatest concern for safety and accidents; whereas, unions representing the education and professional industries expressed more concern for traditional employment issues like job security, member participation, work load, work schedule, and retirement. These findings might be explained by the environmental characteristics of the industry. That is to say, safety and accident prevention is probably more salient among industries that are inherently dangerous (e.g., construction and goods producing) than industries that experience relatively low levels of accident rates (e.g., educational and professional).

In sharp contrast to the consensus regarding concern for tangible aspects of member health, there was less agreement among union presidents regarding the extent of concern for intangible issues.

The chart below displays the extent to which union presidents were concerned about intangible issues. A cursory examination of the Top 5 OHP-related issues chart and the one presented below indicates that 1) union leaders are less concerned about intangible issues than tangible ones, and 2) there is more variability in union responses regarding concern for intangible issues than tangible ones. It is interesting to note that only 63% of union presidents reported that they were 'very concerned' with the intangible OHP-related issue rated as most important (i.e., occupational stress) whereas 67% reported that they were 'very concerned' with the tangible OHP-related issue rated as least important (i.e., workplace injuries).



Statistical analyses supported the preliminary contention that unions are more concerned with tangible OHP-related issues than intangible ones. Two composite scores were formed by calculating the average amount of concern for tangible OHP-related issues (e.g., accidents, safety, and workplace injuries) and intangible OHP-related issues (e.g., burnout, occupational stress, and work-life balance). Results indicated that tangible issues (average = 4.10) were of greater concern to unions than intangible issues (average = 3.08).

Part B: Services

Services provided by a union typically reflect the issues about which it is most concerned. The table presented below displays the percentage of local or national/international unions that provide the services and programs listed to all union members.

Results are moderately consistent with those presented in Part A. Tangible issues seem to take precedence over the intangible ones because more services relating to safety, disability, and medical insurance are provided than are programs relating to psychological issues such as stress management, and social skills training. However, it should be noted that a number of other services (e.g., member assistance programs, legal services, etc.) that cannot be readily categorized as physical or psychological are offered frequently. In addition, other factors such as the size of the union affect the union's ability to provided services to members.

Service	Percentage
Member assistance programs	85%
Safety training	81%
Disability assistance	77%
Job training programs	77%
Educational assistance	73%
Legal services	73%
Medical insurance	69%
Employee involvement programs	60%
Preventative health training	56%
Stress management training	48%
Flexible work schedules	46%
Wellness programs	42%
Social skills training	36%
Health risk assessment	32%
Elder care assistance	15%
Child care assistance	8%

Data indicated that industry differences affected 1) the most frequently provided service and program, and 2) the total number of services provided. As mentioned previously, industries that are inherently dangerous seem to be most concerned with accident prevention and training. Consistent with this finding, unions representing construction, energy, and manufacturing were more likely to offer safety training (nearly 100% of unions reportedly offered) than unions representing education and professional workers (approximately 50% of unions offered). Education unions were most likely to offer disability and legal services to members. In addition, the total number of services provided differed according to industry with medical and education unions offering the fewest number of services to members; construction, energy and manufacturing offered the most services to members.

Part C: Union-management Effort

The union-management effort portion of the questionnaire assessed participant perceptions of the union and management effort in achieving various outcomes. Results indicated that, on average, union officials viewed the extent of management effort as less than or equal to union effort on all outcomes. There were no differences in ratings of union-management effort between industries.

Frequency of Union-Management Effort Patterns

	100% Union Effort	75% Union Effort	Equal Effort	75% Mgmt. Effort	100% Mgmt. Effort
Work design	2	5	7	9	3
Health & safety	2	4	14	6	1
Productivity	2	6	12	5	2
Work hours	8	5	8	5	1
Working conditions	3	10	10	3	1
Labor-management conflict	4	5	17	1	0
Wages	7	7	11	2	0
Benefits	7	8	10	2	0
Treatment of employees	7	8	11	1	0
Job security	9	8	10	0	0

Appendix A

Extent of Concern for OHP-related Issues

OHP-related Issue	N	Average	SD
Safety	27	4.33	1.11
Accidents	27	4.11	1.37
Physical Well-Being of Members	27	3.96	0.94
Job Security	27	3.93	1.24
Work Load	27	3.89	1.19
Member Participation	27	3.85	1.06
Retirement	27	3.85	1.17
Education & Training of the Workforce	26	3.81	1.36
Member Commitment to the Union	27	3.78	1.05
Workplace Injuries	27	3.78	1.55
Occupational Stress	27	3.70	1.03
Work Schedules	27	3.59	1.45
Psychological Well-Being of Members	27	3.56	1.15
Family Issues for Members	26	3.54	1.42
Changing Technology	27	3.52	1.45
Ergonomics	26	3.50	1.30
Work Pace	27	3.48	1.55
Teamwork	27	3.37	1.42
Disability Compensation	25	3.28	1.49
Aging Workforce	26	3.19	1.23
Skills Obsolescence	26	3.04	1.40
Alcohol/Drug Abuse	26	3.00	1.36
Burnout	27	3.00	1.52
Attendance	26	2.92	1.47
Turnover	27	2.89	1.65
Work Design	27	2.85	1.46
Work-Life Balance	27	2.85	1.54
Globalization Issues	27	2.81	1.44
Workplace Violence	27	2.70	1.71
Diversity	27	2.56	1.47
Workaholism	27	2.37	1.62
Career Planning	26	2.15	1.78

Appendix B

Frequency of Concern with OHP-related Issues

OHP-related Issue	N	Not at all	A very small extent	A small extent	Some extent	A great extent	A very great extent
Safety	27	0	1	2	1	6	17
Accidents	27	0	3	0	5	2	17
Physical Well-Being of Members	27	0	0	2	6	10	9
Job Security	27	0	2	1	6	6	12
Work Load	27	0	2	1	5	9	10
Member Participation	27	0	1	2	5	11	8
Retirement	27	0	0	5	5	6	11
Education & Training of the Workforce	26	1	1	2	5	7	11
Member Commitment to the Union	27	0	1	1	9	8	8
Workplace Injuries	27	1	3	1	4	5	13
Occupational Stress	27	0	1	2	7	11	6
Work Schedules	27	1	3	1	4	10	8
Psychological Well-Being of Members	27	0	1	4	8	7	7
Family Issues for Members	26	1	2	2	6	7	8
Changing Technology	27	2	1	3	2	13	6
Ergonomics	26	1	1	2	9	6	7
Work Pace	27	1	4	1	5	7	9
Teamwork	27	1	2	4	6	7	7
Disability Compensation	25	1	3	4	2	10	5
Aging Workforce	26	2	0	2	12	7	3
Skills Obsolescence	26	2	1	5	8	6	4
Alcohol/Drug Abuse	26	1	3	4	9	5	4
Burnout	27	2	1	8	7	2	7
Attendance	26	1	4	6	4	7	4
Turnover	27	4	1	4	9	3	6
Work Design	27	1	5	4	9	3	5
Work-Life Balance	27	3	2	5	7	6	4
Globalization Issues	27	2	4	3	7	8	2
Workplace Violence	27	4	3	4	8	2	6
Diversity	27	1	6	6	6	2	4
Workaholism	27	5	4	3	9	3	3
Career Planning	26	6	6	3	3	5	3