Occupational Health Policies and Workers' Safety in the Fast Food Restaurants in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examines the link between occupational health policies and workers' safety in selected fast-food restaurants in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State, Nigeria. Given the unique challenges of the fast food sector, which include high-paced work environments, exposure to physical hazards, and limited adherence to safety regulations, the study explores employee awareness, the impact of these policies, implementation challenges, and strategies for improvement. Using a survey research design and a census sampling method, data were collected from all 92 employees across four selected fast-food restaurants through a structured questionnaire. The data collected were analyzed using percentages and frequency distributions that were represented in charts. Based on the analysis of the data, findings show that while some employees are aware of occupational health policies, some of them remain uninformed or only somewhat aware, revealing a key concerning terms of knowledge and compliance. The study further reveals that while occupational health policies have a positive impact on worker safety and well-being, their inconsistent implementation weakens their effectiveness. Key challenges identified include poor enforcement of policies, lack of management commitment insufficient training programs among others. Based on these findings, the study recommends increased awareness and training, stronger policy enforcement, and adequate financial investment in occupational health measures.

Keywords: *Occupational health policies, workers safety, fast food, restaurant, Yenagoa*

Introduction

Occupational health and safety within the fast-food industry have garnered significant global attention due to the unique challenges presented by this rapidly growing sector. The fast-paced nature of fast-food operations often leads to an increased risk of workplace injuries and health issues among employees. Globally, the food industry exhibits a 60% higher rate of occupational illness and injury compared to non-food industries, with a lost-time injury rate more than double that of other sectors (Newman et al., 2015).One of the primary concerns in the fast-food industry is the prevalence of ergonomic hazards that result in musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs), burns, and slips and falls. Employees in this sector often perform repetitive tasks, such as prolonged standing, bending, and lifting heavy objects, which contribute to chronic back pain and joint problems (Health and Safety Executive, 2023). Furthermore, the use of hot cooking surfaces, deep fryers, and sharp kitchen tools increases the likelihood of burns and lacerations. According to a study conducted in the United States, fast-food workers experience burn injuries at nearly twice the rate of employees in other industries, with 79% of kitchen staff reporting at least one burn incident annually (Almeida et al., 2020). Additionally, the high-pressure environment and the demand for speed often result in increased stress levels, leading to mental health concerns such as anxiety and depression among workers (Dickey et al., 2021).

Another significant aspect of occupational health in fast-food restaurants is the lack of proper training and enforcement of safety regulations, particularly in developing countries like Nigeria. Many fast-food establishments operate without strict adherence to health and safety guidelines, placing employees at risk of exposure to unhygienic conditions and food borne pathogens. A study in Benin City, Nigeria, found that over half (52.6%) of food handlers in fast-food restaurants had never received formal training on food hygiene and safety, contributing to a 37.5% prevalence of food contamination in these establishments (Isara et al., 2010). The absence of structured occupational health policies in Nigeria's informal economy further exacerbates this problem, as workers often lack access to health insurance, compensation for workplace injuries, and protective equipment (Okpala & Ogbodo, 2022).Beyond the immediate risks of food contamination, the

lack of training and enforcement of occupational health policies exposes fast-food workers to a range of hazardous workplace conditions. Employees often work in poorly ventilated kitchens with high temperatures, leading to dehydration, heat exhaustion, and reduced productivity. In many cases, the absence of basic protective measures, such as gloves, aprons, and slip-resistant footwear, increases workers' vulnerability to injuries. Additionally, fast-food outlets in Nigeria frequently employ young workers and students, many of whom are unaware of workplace safety protocols and hesitant to report hazardous conditions due to job insecurity. The high turnover rate in the industry further complicates efforts to implement consistent training programs, as new employees are often thrust into demanding roles without adequate preparation. Furthermore, the informal nature of many fast-food businesses means that compliance with labor laws and safety regulations is often overlooked in favor of profit maximization. Employers may neglect their responsibility to provide a safe working environment, failing to conduct risk assessments or invest in employee well-being. The lack of governmental oversight and enforcement mechanisms allows hazardous practices to persist, making fast-food restaurants a high-risk sector for occupational injuries. In the absence of regulatory intervention, employees are left to navigate workplace hazards on their own, often resorting to makeshift safety measures that do not effectively mitigate risks.

The fast-food industry has experienced rapid expansion in Nigeria, particularly in urban centers such as Yenagoa, Bayelsa State. This growth has brought to the forefront concerns regarding the implementation of effective occupational health policies and the assurance of worker safety. The findings established by Isara et al. (2010) present a critical need for comprehensive training programmes and stringent adherence to safety protocols to prevent food borne illnesses and protect both workers and consumers. For the fast food sector in Yenagoa, it has increasingly served as a significant contributor to the local economy, offering employment opportunities and catering to the dietary preferences of the urban population. However, the rapid proliferation of fast-food establishments necessitates a thorough examination of existing occupational health policies and worker safety practices. Research specific to Yenagoa indicates a strong correlation between worker competence planning and organizational resilience in fast-food companies. A study highlighted that effective competence planning significantly

enhances organizational resilience, particularly in aspects such as situational awareness and vulnerability management (Barnabas & Ujadughele, 2023). This suggests that investing in employee training and development not only improves health and safety outcomes but also bolsters the overall adaptability and robustness of fast-food enterprises in the region.

Drawing from above, it is important to state that the emphasis on occupational health and safety within the fast-food industry is more evident in Nigeria's urban centers. Hence, there is every justification to understand the peculiar challenges faced by workers in Yenagoa fast-food restaurants. This current study is geared towards understanding how occupational health polices align with the safety of workers in the fast food sector in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State.

Statement of the Problem

As indicated in the introduction, Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) remain a significant challenge in Nigeria, particularly within the fast-food sector, where rapid service demands, long working hours, and inadequate enforcement of safety standards expose workers to numerous hazards. Despite the existence of the Factories Act of 2004 and the Employee's Compensation Act of 2010, which provide a legal framework for workplace safety in Nigeria, enforcement remains weak, particularly in the informal sector (Okpala & Ogbodo, 2022; Abusomwan, 2024). The International Labour Organization (ILO, 2021) estimates that Nigeria records over 2.5 million occupational injuries annually, a substantial proportion of which occur in labor-intensive and service-oriented sectors such as the food industry. Studies indicate that fast-food workers in Nigeria are exposed to thermal hazards from high kitchen temperatures, ergonomic risks due to prolonged standing and repetitive motions, and biological hazards from improper food handling (Isara et al., 2010). Additionally, a significant number of employees in the sector work under precarious conditions with limited access to protective gear, healthcare, or compensation for workplace injuries, exacerbating health risks and reducing overall job satisfaction (Barnabas & Ujadughele, 2023).

The lack of structured workplace safety policies in Nigeria's fast-food industry is further compounded by poor regulatory oversight. Many fast-food outlets in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State, operate within a largely informal economy where

compliance with occupational health policies is not prioritized. As indicated above, Isara et al. (2010) in their study in Benin City, established that a good number of food handlers in fast-food restaurants had never received formal training on food hygiene and safety, contributing to widespread food contamination in these establishments. This lack of training increases the likelihood of food borne illnesses and occupational diseases among workers. Additionally, Newman et al. (2015) report that the fast-food industry has a 60% higher rate of occupational injuries compared to other sectors, with kitchen burns, cuts, and slips being the most common incidents. Despite these alarming statistics, most research in Nigeria has focused on occupational health in heavy industries such as oil and gas, construction, and manufacturing, leaving a significant gap in understanding how OHS policies are implemented in service industries like fast food (Dickey et al., 2021).

While some studies, such as Isara et al. (2010) and Abusomwan (2024) have investigated food hygiene and contamination, there is limited research on the overall occupational health conditions of fast-food workers, particularly regarding employees' awareness of safety policies, the effectiveness of workplace safety training, the adequacy of safety equipment, and the psychological effects of unsafe work environments. Furthermore, few studies (such as those by Onwuka, & Nwachukwu, 2019; Obi, 2020; Oludayo, Olamide, & Akinlolu, 2021; Okpala & Ogbodo, 2022; have explored employees' perceptions of management's commitment to workplace safety and how these perceptions influence compliance with safety regulations. The absence of comprehensive data on these issues in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State, creates a crucial research gap, as localized studies are essential for developing targeted interventions that improve worker health and safety.

This study seeks to fill this gap by assessing the state of occupational health and safety in fast-food restaurants in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State. The research will provide empirical data on employees' awareness of OHS policies, the effectiveness of workplace safety training programs, common workplace hazards, the adequacy of safety equipment, and the impact of occupational health policies on employees' well-being. Additionally, it will examine employees' perceptions of management's commitment to workplace safety and how this affects overall workplace safety

culture.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to provide an empirical insight on the link between occupational health policy and workers' safety using the fast food restaurant sector in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State, Nigeria, as its case study. Essentially, the study's specific objectives are to:

i Determine the level of employees' awareness of occupational health and safety policies in fast-food restaurants in Yenagoa.
ii Examine whether occupational health policies have had positive impacts on workers safety and wellbeing in the fast foods sector in Yenagoa.
iii Find out the challenges hindering the implementation of occupational health policies in fast food restaurants in Yenagoa.
iv Recommend ways to enhance occupational health policies for effective workers' safety in the fast food sector in Yenagoa.

Research Questions

i What is the level of employees' awareness of occupational health and safety policies in fast-food restaurants in Yenagoa?
ii What is the impact of occupational health policies on workers safety and wellbeing?
iii What are the challenges hindering the implementation of occupational health policies in fast food restaurants in Yenagoa?
iv How can the occupational health policies be enhanced to facilitate effective workers' safety in the fast food sector in Yenagoa?

Review of Related Literature

Conceptual Review/ Framework

This section deals with a clarification of the concepts in terms of how previous scholars view them in light of the writings. It also deals with the analytical connections between these concepts in a schematic manner showing how they relate. This makes it easy to understand how the variables in the study intersect each other with a view to providing better understanding of their meaning in the context of our own study.

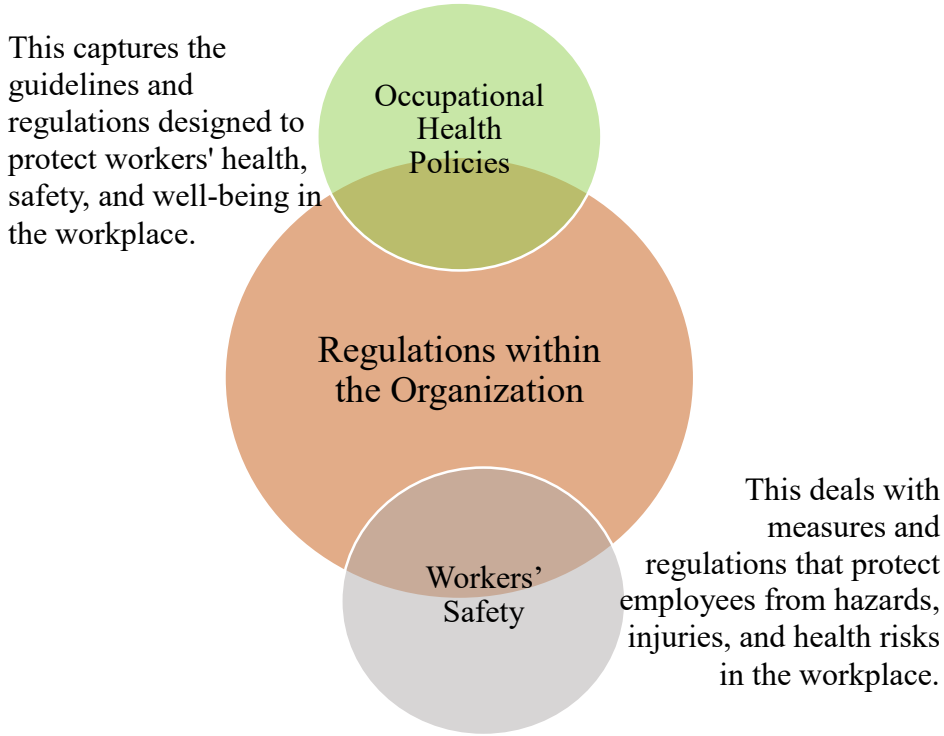


Fig. 1: Conceptual Framework Linking Occupational Health Policies and Workers' Safety

This section deals with two major sub-themes. The first deals with the conceptualization of the major variables in the study such as occupational health policies, workers safety/organization. Hence, in our context, the first concept, *occupational health policies* refer to a set of principles, guidelines, and regulations designed to protect workers from health risks and ensure safe working environments. These policies are formulated by governments, regulatory agencies, and organizations to prevent workplace hazards, promote well-being, and improve productivity (WHO, 2021). They encompass aspects such as workplace hazard identification, risk assessment, preventive measures, and employee training (Goetsch, 2019). According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), occupational health policies are essential for ensuring compliance with labor laws and enhancing workers' quality of life (ILO, 2022). Such policies include

regulatory frameworks like the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA) and international labor conventions. On the other hand, *workers' safety* covers measures, regulations, and practices aimed at preventing workplace injuries, illnesses, and fatalities. It involves personal protective equipment (PPE), hazard control systems, workplace ergonomics, emergency preparedness, and occupational health surveillance (Burton, 2010). Ensuring workers' safety is a shared responsibility between employers, employees, and regulatory agencies. Research has shown that effective safety programs reduce workplace incidents and improve employee morale and productivity (Neal & Griffin, 2020). The ILO (2022) emphasizes that a safe working environment is a fundamental human right and a prerequisite for sustainable industrial development.

In relation to the framework, it is easy to see from Figure 1 above that the relationship between occupational health policies and workers' safety is grounded in regulatory and preventive approaches within an organization that aim to reduce workplace hazards and promote well-being. Occupational health policies establish legal and procedural frameworks that work organizations must adopt to create safe working conditions, thereby directly influencing workers' safety (Goetsch, 2019). These policies include hazard identification, risk assessments, training programs, and enforcement mechanisms that mitigate occupational risks (ILO, 2022). According to Burton (2010), workplaces with robust occupational health policies report lower accident rates, improved worker morale, and increased productivity. Furthermore, industries that prioritize compliance with safety regulations, such as the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA), significantly reduce the likelihood of workplace injuries and fatalities (Neal & Griffin, 2020). The diagram illustrates this interdependence by positioning industry as the central entity through which occupational health policies and workers' safety interact. Thus, the effectiveness of occupational health policies in ensuring workers' safety depends on industrial compliance and enforcement mechanisms that translate policy into practice.

Empirical Review

Empirical studies on occupational health and safety (OHS) in Nigeria and globally have examined various aspects, including employee awareness, workplace hazards, effectiveness of safety policies, and management commitment to worker

welfare. This section reviews relevant literature with a focus on the methodologies used, samples, data collection techniques, and key findings. For instance, in a recent study, Abusomwan (2024) appraised the Nigerian Factory Act 2004, assessing its adequacy in protecting workers in industrial settings. The study employed a doctrinal research method, which involved a detailed examination of legal texts, policy documents, and judicial decisions. Findings indicated significant gaps in enforcement mechanisms due to insufficient expertise, wide discretion granted to enforcement personnel, and non-deterrent penalties for violations. The study highlighted the need for urgent legislative review to strengthen workplace safety regulations.

However, within the fast foods sector, Almeida, Johnson, and Roberts (2020) examined occupational hazards, analyzing their prevalence and the effectiveness of preventive measures. A mixed-methods approach was adopted, incorporating surveys distributed to 500 fast-food workers across multiple regions and qualitative interviews with 30 managers. The study found that burns, slips, and exposure to high temperatures were the most common hazards. While safety training programs were in place, their effectiveness was limited due to poor adherence and lack of enforcement. The authors recommended stricter regulatory oversight and enhanced training protocols. On their own part, Barnabas and Ujadughele (2023) explored worker competence planning and organizational resilience in fast-food companies in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State. A cross-sectional survey design was utilized, involving 250 employees across different restaurant chains. Data were collected using structured questionnaires and analyzed using regression analysis. Findings showed a strong correlation between worker competence in handling occupational risks and overall organizational resilience. The study suggested that structured training programs could mitigate workplace hazards and enhance safety culture.

Furthermore, Dickey, Fitzgerald, and Carter (2021) conducted a systematic review of work stress and mental health outcomes among fast-food employees. The study synthesized findings from 35 peer-reviewed journal articles using meta-analysis techniques. Data sources included survey-based and experimental studies that examined stress-related disorders, burnout, and job dissatisfaction. The review found that poor working conditions, high job demands, and lack of managerial

support significantly contributed to mental health issues. The study recommended incorporating mental health support systems into occupational safety policies. Isara et al. (2010) investigated food contamination risks in fast-food restaurants in Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria. The study utilized a field survey and laboratory analysis methodology, sampling food handlers and testing food samples for bacterial contamination. The findings indicated that inadequate hygiene practices and lack of strict compliance with safety protocols contributed to food contamination risks. The study underscored the importance of integrating food safety training into OHS policies to reduce public health risks.

Additionally, Newman et al. (2015) examined injury rates in the food industry through a longitudinal study that analyzed workplace injury reports from 2010 to 2014. The study used a secondary data approach, drawing from occupational safety databases. Findings confirmed that employees in fast-food settings experienced higher injury rates compared to other sectors, with musculoskeletal injuries and burns being predominant. The study recommended improved ergonomic workplace designs and mandatory safety training. Obi (2020) assessed the impact of occupational health policies in Nigeria, particularly within the oil and gas sector. The study employed a qualitative approach, utilizing in-depth interviews with 50 industry professionals and content analysis of policy documents. The findings revealed inconsistencies in policy implementation and a lack of worker-centered safety measures. The study proposed a more structured enforcement framework to ensure compliance with existing regulations. Okpala and Ogbodo (2022) analyzed workplace safety in Nigeria's informal sector, identifying policy gaps and challenges. The study utilized a case study approach, drawing on interviews with small business owners and workers in the manufacturing and service industries. Findings revealed that many informal sector employees lacked access to basic safety equipment and training. The authors recommended the expansion of safety regulations to cover informal workplaces.

Oludayo, Olamide, and Akinlolu (2021) evaluated the enforcement of occupational safety regulations in Nigeria. The study employed a case study approach, selecting three industrial sectors—manufacturing, construction, and food processing. Data collection involved structured interviews with safety

officers and workplace inspections. Findings showed that enforcement agencies were underfunded, leading to weak compliance levels. The study called for improved government investment in OHS enforcement bodies. Onwuka and Nwachukwu (2019) examined the effectiveness of occupational safety programs in Nigeria across different sectors. A comparative analysis method was employed, assessing safety programs in manufacturing, oil and gas, and food industries. Data were collected through surveys distributed to 400 employees and analyzed using descriptive statistics. Results indicated that while safety programs existed, their implementation varied significantly across sectors, with the food industry having lower compliance levels. The study suggested uniform safety enforcement across industries to enhance worker protection.

It is important to note that the various studies reviewed above exposes the critical occupational health and safety (OHS) challenges across various sectors, including the fast-food industry in Nigeria. Key issues identified include weak enforcement of safety regulations, inadequate worker training, high injury rates, and mental health concerns. While some studies emphasize the role of legal frameworks and policy gaps, others focus on the impact of worker competence, safety programs, and managerial commitment. The findings collectively underscore the urgent need for improved regulatory oversight, structured training programs, and enhanced workplace safety measures to mitigate risks and foster a safer working environment in Nigeria's fast-food sector.

Theoretical Framework

The study adopts the Systems Theory, developed by Ludwig von Bertalanffy (1968), given that it provides a strong framework that captures the understanding of occupational health policies as a systemic input in the workplace and workers' safety as a conditional output. The theory argues that no system functions in isolation; rather, its components must work harmoniously to achieve stability, efficiency, and sustainability. In the context of occupational health policies in Nigeria's fast-food sector, this theory captures how such policies are shaped by regulatory enforcement, and environmental factors. The theory is particularly relevant for analyzing how lapses in one part of the system can create vulnerabilities that jeopardize overall workplace safety.

A central assumption of Systems Theory is that organizations function as open systems, meaning they continuously interact with external and internal environments. Unlike closed systems, which are self-contained and unaffected by external influences, open systems rely on a constant exchange of information, resources, and feedback to maintain equilibrium (Katz & Kahn, 1978). Within the fast-food industry, occupational health policies are influenced by multiple external factors, including labor laws, industry safety regulations, and socio-economic conditions. For example, a poorly regulated labour market with weak enforcement of safety laws allow businesses to prioritize profit over worker welfare, leading to hazardous working conditions. Internally, factors such as management commitment, employee adherence to safety protocols, and the provision of protective equipment further shape workplace safety outcomes. When these elements are not well-coordinated, system dysfunction emerges, resulting in frequent workplace injuries, poor compliance with safety standards, and an overall decline in worker well-being.

Another key principle of Systems Theory is the concept of feedback loops, which enable organizations to learn from past experiences and adjust their strategies accordingly. Positive feedback loops reinforce effective safety measures by encouraging continuous improvement, whereas negative feedback loops highlight deficiencies and provide an opportunity for corrective actions (Ashby, 1956). In the case of OHS in Nigeria's fast-food sector, feedback mechanisms could include employee safety reports, regular risk assessments, and enforcement audits. However, when such systems are weak or ignored—due to lack of managerial commitment or regulatory oversight—safety problems persist, and accidents become recurring issues. The absence of proper feedback loops also contributes to a reactive rather than proactive approach to workplace safety, where businesses implement changes only after incidents occur rather than preventing them in the first place.

Moreover, the theory introduces the idea of equifinality, which suggests that multiple pathways can lead to the same outcome. This principle is crucial for understanding why some fast-food businesses manage to maintain high safety standards despite operating under similar economic and regulatory conditions as those with poor safety records (Boulding, 1956). For example, while some

organizations achieve workplace safety through rigorous staff training, others may rely on strict supervision and enforcement of safety policies. However, the effectiveness of these different approaches depends on how well they are integrated into the overall system. A fragmented approach leads to inconsistent safety outcomes. Systems Theory, therefore, highlights the importance of a holistic, integrated approach to occupational health, where different components work together to sustain a safe working environment.

Applying this theoretical framework to the current study provides a lens through which the interplay between various occupational health determinants in the fast-food sector in Yenagoa can be examined. It allows for an exploration of how the lack of coordination among regulatory agencies, fast-food operators, and employees contributes to workplace hazards. The theory also helps explain why safety interventions sometimes fail—not necessarily due to a lack of policy but because of weak system-wide integration and enforcement. Hence, the theory helps us to view occupational health and safety as a dynamic system rather than a set of isolated practices. Using the Systems Theory, the study aims to assess whether the existing structures governing occupational health in the fast-food industry in Yenagoa is functional and effective enough.

Methodology

This study adopts a survey research design given that it is appropriate for collecting data within a short period. The population for this study comprises all 91 staff members working across four selected fast-food establishments in Yenagoa: Chicken Republic (50), Kilimanjaro (19), Buka Swallow (12), and Megroasty (10). These fast-food restaurants were chosen because of their popularity, size, and location in the city centre. Given the small population size, a census sampling approach was employed, whereby all 91 staff members were included in the study. This ensures comprehensive coverage of the workforce and enhances the reliability of findings by eliminating potential biases associated with smaller sample sizes. A purposive sampling technique was used to ensure that all the individuals directly involved in the selected fast-food operations were targeted.

Data collection was conducted using a self-designed structured questionnaire. For data analysis, responses were processed using descriptive statistical tools. Socio-demographic data were analyzed using frequency distributions and percentages, presented in tabular format for clarity. The research questions were analyzed using Microsoft Excel charts to visually represent patterns, trends, and key insights derived from the responses.

Results

The data collected in the course of the fieldwork were analyzed and results arrived at based on a return rate of 89 (96.74%) out of 91 questionnaires that were distributed.

Socio-Demographic Data

Variable	*Category*	*Frequency (n=89)*	*Percentage (%)*
Age	18 - 25 years	30	33.7
	26 - 35 years	40	44.9
	36 - 45 years	14	15.7
	46 years and above	5	5.6
	Total	**89**	**100.0**
Sex	Male	41	46.1
	Female	48	53.9
	Total	**89**	**100.0**
Marital Status	Single	50	56.2
	Married	32	36.0
	Divorced/Separated	7	7.9
	Total	**89**	**100.0**
Education	Secondary	20	22.5
	OND/NCE	28	31.5
	HND/Bachelor's Degree	33	37.1
	Postgraduate	6	6.7
	Others	2	2.2
	Total	**89**	**100.0**
Job Position	Cashier	30	33.7
	Cook	25	28.1
	Supervisor	29	32.6
	Manager	5	5.6

	Total	**89**	**100.0**
Religion	Christianity	80	89.9
	Islam	9	10.1
	Total	**89**	**100.0**

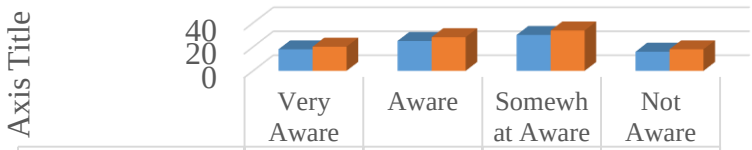
Source: Fieldwork, 2025

Table 1.1 provides an overview of the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents in this study. The age distribution indicates that a majority of respondents (44.9%) are within the 26–35 age groups, followed by 33.7% in the 18–25 categories. Employees aged 36–45 years make up 15.7%, while only 5.6% are 46 years and above. The gender distribution reveals a nearly balanced workforce, with females accounting for 53.9% and males 46.1%. In terms of marital status, more than half of the respondents (56.2%) are single. Married employees constitute 36.0%, while 7.9% are divorced or separated. Educationally, the majority of employees possess at least a secondary education, with 31.5% having OND/NCE qualifications and 37.1% holding HND/Bachelor's degrees. Those with only a secondary education account for 22.5%, while a small percentage (6.7%) have postgraduate qualifications, and 2.2% fall under the "Others" category. The job position cashiers (33.7%) and cooks (28.1%) make up the bulk of the workforce, with supervisors accounting for 32.6%. Managers constitute only 5.6% of respondents, which reflects the typical structure of fast-food businesses where managerial positions are fewer compared to frontline roles. Finally, religious affiliation among respondents indicates that Christianity is the predominant faith, with 89.9% of employees identifying as Christians, while 10.1% are Muslims.

Substantive Data

RQ1: What is the level of employees' awareness of occupational health and safety policies in fast-food restaurants in Yenagoa?

Fig. 1: Level of awareness of occupational health and safety among staff



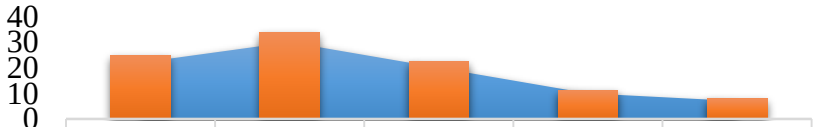
	Very Aware	Aware	Somewhat Aware	Not Aware
Frequency (n=89)	18	25	30	16
Percentage	20.2	28.1	33.7	18

Source: Fieldwork, 2025

Fig 1 presents the level of awareness of occupational health and safety policies among employees in fast-food restaurants in Yenagoa. The results indicate that a significant proportion of the respondents (33.7%) are only somewhat aware of these policies, suggesting gaps in comprehensive knowledge. While 28.1% of the employees reported being aware, only 20.2% indicated a high level of awareness. Notably, 18.0% of the respondents admitted to having no awareness of occupational health and safety policies, which raises concerns about workplace safety and regulatory compliance.

RQ2: What is the impact of occupational health policies on workers safety and wellbeing?

Fig. 2: Impact of occupational health policies on workers' saftey and wellbeing



	Highly Positive	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Highly Negative
Frequency (n=89)	22	30	20	10	7
Percentage	24.7	33.7	22.5	11.2	7.9

Source: Fieldwork, 2025

The data in Fig. 2 above deals with the impact of occupational health policies on workers' safety and well-being. From the data, 24.7% of the respondents reported a highly positive impact, while 33.7% acknowledged a generally positive effect. This suggests that over half (58.4%) of the workers recognize occupational health policies as beneficial in enhancing workplace safety and well-being. However, 22.5% of respondents remained neutral, and 11.2% of the respondents reported a negative impact, while 7.9% perceived the policies as highly negative, highlighting that a small but notable proportion of workers believe the policies are ineffective or even detrimental.

RQ 3: What are the challenges hindering the implementation of occupational health policies in fast food restaurants in Yenagoa?

Fig. 3: Challenges hindering the implementation of occupational health policies



	Lack of Management Commitment	Insufficient Training Programs	Poor Enforcement of Policies	Low Employee Awareness	Cost of Implementation
Frequency (n=89)	20	18	25	15	11
Percentage	22.5	20.2	28.1	16.9	12.4

Source: Fieldwork, 2025

Fig. 3 above shows the analysis of the challenges hindering the implementation of occupational health policies in fast-food restaurants in Yenagoa. The data shows that several key barriers exist and that the most significant challenge is the poor enforcement of policies, reported by 28.1% of respondents, suggesting that regulatory oversight and adherence to safety measures are weak. Lack of management commitment (22.5%) and insufficient training programs (20.2%) further indicate that organizational leadership and workforce education play crucial roles in ensuring occupational health and safety. Additionally, low employee awareness (16.9%) signifies a gap in communication and sensitization efforts regarding safety policies. Lastly, the cost of implementation (12.4%)

suggests that financial constraints also contribute to the ineffective adoption of safety regulations.

RQ 4: How can occupational health policies be enhanced to facilitate effective workers' safety in the fast food sector in Yenagoa?

Fig. 4: Ways of improving occupational health policies for effective workers' safety



	Strengthening Policy Enforcement	Providing Regular Training Programs	Increasing Management Commitment	Improving Employee Awareness	Allocating More Funds for Implementation
Frequency (n=89)	24	20	18	15	12
Percentage	27	22.5	20.2	16.9	13.5

Source: Fieldwork, 2025

Fig. 4 above reveals that strengthening policy enforcement (27.0%) is the most recommended strategy for enhancing occupational health and safety policies in fast-food restaurants in Yenagoa. This suggests that many respondents perceive inadequate enforcement as a significant gap in ensuring workplace safety. Providing regular training programs (22.5%) is also identified as a crucial approach, indicating that many employees may lack adequate knowledge of safety protocols. Increasing management commitment (20.2%) underscores the role of leadership in driving effective health policies, while improving employee awareness (16.9%) highlights the need for sensitization efforts. Lastly, allocating more funds for implementation (13.5%) suggests that financial constraints may be limiting the execution of necessary safety measures.

Findings

Based on the objectives and research questions that guided this study, the findings are quite instructive. The first is that while some employees are aware of occupational health policies, a significant proportion are only somewhat aware, or have no awareness at all. This aligns with the findings of Almeida, Johnson, and

Roberts (2020), which identified low awareness levels as a critical barrier to occupational health policy effectiveness in the fast-food sector. Similarly, Isara et al. (2010) found that food handlers in Nigerian restaurants often lack adequate knowledge of food hygiene and safety regulations, further supporting the argument that awareness gaps persist in this sector. The findings also reinforce Burton's (2010) WHO Healthy Workplace Framework, which underscores the importance of awareness and training in ensuring workplace safety.

Regarding the impact of occupational health policies, this study found that a good number of the respondents viewed these policies as having a positive or highly positive effect on their safety and well-being, which is consistent with Obi (2020), who examined occupational health policies in Nigeria's oil and gas sector and found a similar positive perception. However, few of the respondents who perceived occupational health policies as having a negative or highly negative impact suggest that policy implementation may not be uniform or effective across all fast-food restaurants. This partially aligns with the findings of Dickey, Fitzgerald, and Carter (2021), who observed that inconsistent enforcement of safety regulations leads to workplace stress and dissatisfaction.

The challenges hindering occupational health policy implementation were identified as poor enforcement, lack of management commitment, and insufficient training programmes. These results strongly align with previous studies such as Okpala and Ogbodo (2022), who found that policy gaps and poor enforcement mechanisms significantly hinder workplace safety in Nigeria. Additionally, Oludayo, Olamide, and Akinlolu (2021) emphasized that weak regulatory oversight is a primary factor limiting the effectiveness of occupational safety laws. Furthermore, Barnabas and Ujadughele (2023) highlighted the role of organizational leadership in ensuring policy adherence, reinforcing the importance of management commitment.

The enhancement strategies proposed in this study such as the need to strengthen policy enforcement, providing regular training, and increasing management commitment, all corroborate findings from the International Labour Organization (2021), which emphasized the necessity of regulatory compliance and training in improving occupational safety. Similarly, Neal and Griffin (2020) demonstrated

that a strong safety climate within organizations leads to better adherence to occupational health regulations. Additionally, Goetsch (2019) emphasized the role of financial investment in ensuring comprehensive policy implementation, which supports the 13.5% of respondents in this study who recommended allocating more funds for policy execution.

Conclusion

The importance of occupational health policies in ensuring workplace safety and employee well-being cannot be overstated. This study affirms that while some employees are aware of these policies, a significant proportion remain uninformed, highlighting the need for greater awareness and education. Effective occupational health policies positively influence employee safety and well-being, yet inconsistencies in implementation reduce their overall impact. Challenges such as poor enforcement, lack of management commitment, and inadequate training continue to hinder the effectiveness of these policies. Strengthening enforcement mechanisms, ensuring dedicated management involvement, and providing regular training are critical steps toward improving workplace safety standards. Additionally, financial investment in occupational health initiatives will further enhance policy execution and compliance. A concerted effort by policymakers, business owners, and regulatory bodies is essential to address existing challenges and create safer working environments. Occupational health policies must not only exist in principle but be actively implemented and monitored to safeguard employee health and productivity.

Recommendations

i. Fast-food restaurant employees should receive regular training on occupational health policies through workshops, seminars, and on-the-job learning sessions. This will bridge awareness gaps, improve compliance, and cultivate a culture of safety in the workplace.
ii. Regulatory bodies such as the Federal Ministry of Labour and Productivity (Inspectorate Division), National Council for Occupational Safety and Health of Nigeria, and the Institute of Safety Professionals, among others should enhance their enforcement mechanisms by conducting frequent inspections, ensuring strict adherence to safety standards, and imposing

penalties for non-compliance. This will promote uniform implementation of occupational health policies across the sector.

iii. Restaurant owners and managers should actively support occupational health policies by prioritizing employee well-being, providing necessary safety equipment, and integrating health and safety considerations into daily operations. A strong safety culture led by management will significantly improve compliance and effectiveness.

iv. The owners or management of the fast-food organizations should ensure that adequate financial investment is directed towards training programs, procurement of safety materials, and continuous monitoring of policy implementation. Allocating resources to occupational health initiatives will ensure long-term sustainability and effectiveness in protecting workers' well-being.

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