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A REVIEW ON OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH HAZARDS & FUTURE CHALLENGES IN THE PRINTING INDUSTRY

Manisha Dikshit[1]* and R. C. Tiwari[2]

[1]Ph.D. Scholar & Associate Professor, Dept. of Agada Tantra, UAU, Rishikul Campus, Haridwar.

[2]Professor & HOD, Dept. of Agada Tantra, UAU, Rishikul Campus, Haridwar.

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***Corresponding Author**
Dr. Manisha Dikshit
Ph.D. Scholar & Associate Professor, Dept. of Agada Tantra, UAU, Rishikul Campus, Haridwar.

ABSTRACT

Work-related occupational hazards are more frequent in industrialized developing countries & these hazards may affect different systems of the body. 1.9 million occupational hazard cases are reported worldwide, out of which 17% are contributed by India. With respect to the printing industry, India stands at the 8th place in the printing industry. This review article describes the background of the printing industry, occupational health hazards & its health impact on different systems of the body. This article also throws light on future challenges, like risk management strategies, preventive measures and technology advancements according the safety standards.

KEYWORDS: Occupational health hazards, Printing industry, Health impact, Future challenges, Ayurveda.

INTRODUCTION

The printing industry has faced considerable challenges concerning occupational health hazards. The historical importance of these hazards reflects broader themes of industrial safety and worker welfare, with significant implications for how industries address health risks. The earliest presses were labour-intensive, involving manual typesetting and inking processes. By the 19th century, the Industrial Revolution had introduced mechanized printing presses, which, while improving efficiency, introduced new health risks.[1]

In 20th century, printers were exposed to a range of hazardous chemicals, including solvents, inks, and cleaning agents. Solvents such as benzene and toluene, used in ink and cleaning

solutions, posed significant risks. Inks used during this period often contained toxic pigments and heavy metals, such as cadmium and chromium.[2]

As the printing industry moved into the digital age, new technologies and materials introduced fresh challenges. In this era, laser printers and copiers like devices often release fine particulate matter and volatile organic compounds (VOCs), which can affect indoor air quality.[3]

Additionally, the trend towards eco-friendly and sustainable printing practices has shifted focus to new materials and technologies, such as soy-based inks and recyclable substrates.[4] The historical trajectory of occupational health hazards in the printing industry highlights the importance of continuous vigilance and adaptation. While developed countries have implemented robust safety regulations and practices, the situation can be markedly different in developing regions where regulatory frameworks may be less stringent.

The historical importance of the printing industry in terms of occupational health hazards underscores the dynamic interplay between technological advancement and worker safety. From the lead poisoning of early printers to the chemical and ergonomic hazards of modern times, the industry's evolution reflects broader trends in industrial safety and health.

Occupational hazards

As the printing industry continues to innovate, it is crucial to prioritize occupational health by embracing safer technologies, implementing rigorous safety standards, and fostering a culture of continuous improvement. Risk assessment is a structured process to evaluate potential hazards in the workplace, understand the likelihood of these hazards leading to incidents, and implement control measures to mitigate them. There are many types of hazards, like, chemical hazards, physical hazards, biological hazards & psychological hazards in the printing industry.

Chemical hazards

Exposure to solvents, inks, dyes, and cleaning agents poses significant health risks to the workers, ranging from acute effects to long-term chronic conditions. Common solvents include benzene, toluene, and xylene. Benzene, a well-known carcinogen, has been linked to leukaemia and other blood disorders. Benzene can lead to bone marrow suppression and blood cancers.[5] Exposure to toluene can cause neurological effects such as headaches,

dizziness, and impaired cognitive function, while xylene exposure has been associated with respiratory issues and liver damage.[6] Heavy metals in inks & dyes can accumulate in the body over time, leading to chronic health conditions. Lead can cause neurological damage, particularly in children.[7] Cadmium and chromium, used for their vibrant colours, are also toxic. Cadmium exposure is associated with kidney damage, bone demineralization, and increased cancer risk.[8] Chromium, particularly hexavalent chromium, is a known carcinogen linked to lung cancer and respiratory issues.[9] Cleaning agents used in the printing industry to remove ink residues often contain strong chemicals such as ammonia, bleach, and various surfactants. These substances can cause acute health issues such as respiratory irritation, chemical burns, and allergic reactions. Here, is a table of chemicals & diseases in the printing industry:

Diseases & Chemicals in printing industry

Chemical	**Specific Usage in Printing**	**Associated Diseases/Health Risks**	**Exposure Route**
Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs) (e.g., benzene, toluene, formaldehyde)	Found in solvent-based inks, cleaning agents, and coatings. Released during ink drying processes.	Respiratory problems (asthma, bronchitis), neurological effects, dizziness, liver and kidney damage, and cancer (long-term exposure).	Inhalation, skin contact
Isopropyl Alcohol (IPA)	Used as a solvent in lithographic printing dampening systems and for cleaning surfaces.	Skin irritation, headaches, dizziness, respiratory tract irritation, potential central nervous system depression.	Inhalation, skin contact
Ethylene Glycol	Used as a solvent in inks, toners, and solvent mixtures. Common in large format printing.	Respiratory irritation, headaches, nausea, skin irritation, kidney and liver damage with long-term exposure.	Inhalation, skin absorption
Heavy Metals (e.g., lead, cadmium, chromium, mercury)	Found in pigments and colorants for certain inks, especially in offset and screen printing.	Lead poisoning (neurological damage), cancer, respiratory disorders, skin rashes, and kidney damage.	Inhalation, ingestion, skin absorption
Phthalates	Used as plasticizers in inks for printing on flexible materials	Endocrine disruption, reproductive toxicity, developmental	Inhalation, skin contact

	(e.g., plastic, vinyl).	abnormalities, possible carcinogenic effects.	
Ammonia	Used for pH stabilization in some dampening systems and cleaning solutions.	Eye, skin, and respiratory tract irritation, coughing, chronic bronchitis, and aggravation of asthma.	Inhalation, skin contact
Perchloroethylene (PCE)	Used in cleaning solvents for printing machines and parts.	Cancer, liver and kidney toxicity, neurological damage, dizziness, respiratory irritation.	Inhalation, skin contact
Methanol	Used as a solvent in inks, coatings, and adhesives. Found in UV-cured inks and some cleaning agents.	Central nervous system damage, blindness (high exposure), dizziness, headaches, nausea, and respiratory issues.	Inhalation, skin absorption
Acrylates	Present in UV-curable inks, varnishes, and coatings. Widely used in digital and screen printing.	Skin irritation, allergic contact dermatitis, respiratory sensitization, eye irritation.	Skin contact, inhalation
Hydrochloric Acid (HCl)	Used in cleaning solutions and as a pH adjuster in certain printing processes.	Eye, skin, and respiratory tract irritation, chronic bronchitis, throat irritation.	Inhalation, skin contact
Styrene	Found in resins and some ink formulations, particularly in flexographic and screen printing.	Eye and skin irritation, respiratory tract irritation, potential carcinogen, possible effects on the nervous system.	Inhalation, skin contact
Nitrocellulose	Used as a binder in inks and coatings, especially in flexographic and gravure printing.	Skin irritation, respiratory issues, headaches, dizziness, potential fire hazard (due to flammability).	Inhalation, skin contact
Trichloroethylene (TCE)	Solvent used in degreasing and cleaning printing equipment.	Kidney damage, respiratory tract irritation, central nervous system effects, cancer (prolonged	Inhalation, skin contact

		exposure).	
Hexane	Used in solvent-based inks and cleaning solvents. Common in flexographic printing.	Neurological damage, skin irritation, headaches, nausea, dizziness, and respiratory issues.	Inhalation, skin absorption
Silica	Used as a filler in some inks and coatings to improve viscosity and durability.	Silicosis, lung irritation, chronic respiratory issues, possible carcinogen with prolonged exposure.	Inhalation
Methyl Ethyl Ketone (MEK)	Solvent used in inks, adhesives, and cleaning agents. Common in screen printing and some digital printing.	Skin irritation, respiratory irritation, dizziness, headaches, possible liver and kidney damage with long-term exposure.	Inhalation, skin absorption

Additionally, many modern cleaning agents contain surfactants and solvents that can contribute to indoor air pollution and pose additional health risk. Ongoing efforts to improve safety standards, adopt less hazardous materials, and ensure proper ventilation and protective equipment are essential to safeguarding worker health in this critical industry.

Physical hazards

In the printing industry, physical hazards, like, noise pollution, ergonomic challenges, and problems related to heat and ventilation also impact on worker's health. High-speed presses, dryers, and other machinery generate substantial noise levels. Prolonged exposure to high noise levels can lead to noise-induced hearing loss (NIHL) and other auditory problems. According to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), continuous exposure to noise levels above 85 decibels can result in permanent hearing damage (NIOSH, 1998). The manual handling of heavy materials, such as paper rolls and printing plates, can lead to musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) including back pain, carpal tunnel syndrome, and tendinitis.[10] High temperatures can lead to heat stress, which manifests as symptoms ranging from heat rash and dehydration to more severe conditions like heat exhaustion and heat stroke. Workers in hot environments may also experience decreased productivity and increased risk of accidents due to impaired concentration.[11] Besides this, proper ventilation is essential to mitigate the risks associated with both heat and airborne contaminants in the printing industry. Regular monitoring of air quality and the implementation of engineering

controls such as local exhaust systems are important steps in managing ventilation-related hazards.

Biological hazards

In the printing industry, biological hazards, particularly mould and mildew, pose significant risks in paper storage areas. These fungi thrive in damp, poorly ventilated environments and can adversely affect both the quality of printed materials and the health of workers. Health risks associated with mould exposure include respiratory problems, allergic reactions, and infections. Mould spores can become airborne and be inhaled, leading to symptoms such as coughing, wheezing, nasal congestion, and eye irritation.[12] High humidity, poor ventilation & water leaking from roofs can cause fungal infections. Additionally, mould can produce mycotoxins, which are toxic compounds that can cause various health problems, including immune system suppression and neurological issues.[13]

Psychological hazards

Work stress, long working hours, and rotational duties are particularly prevalent and contribute to adverse outcomes for employees of the printing industry. Extended work hours can lead to fatigue, decreased alertness, and impaired decision-making abilities.[14] Rotational work schedules can disrupt circadian rhythms, leading to sleep disturbances and fatigue. In the printing industry, where precision and attention to detail are critical, disrupted sleep patterns can negatively affect performance and safety.

Future Challenges & Management strategies

Addressing these challenges through effective management strategies is essential for promoting a healthier work environment. By implementing stress management programs, optimizing work schedules, adjusting rotational duties, and providing robust support systems, the industry can enhance worker's well-being and operational efficiency.

Several techniques can be employed to systematically identify hazards in the printing industry. These methods range from simple observational techniques to more complex, data-driven approaches, like Job Safety Analysis (JSA)**,**Safety Audits and Inspections**,** Hazard and Operability Study (HAZOP), Fault Tree Analysis (FTA)**,** Incident and Accident Reporting Systems, Ergonomic Assessments and Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH).
In the printing industry, like many others, is fraught with both apparent and hidden risks that can have significant consequences on workers' health and safety if left unmanaged. By

employing a mix of both proactive (e.g., safety audits, ergonomic assessments) and reactive (e.g., incident reporting) approaches, organizations can foster a safety culture where risks are continuously identified and managed. Managing risk in the printing industry involves identifying, evaluating, and controlling potential hazards to minimize the likelihood and impact of workplace accidents. With the variety of risks inherent in this sector, including chemical exposure, mechanical hazards, ergonomic strains, and noise-related risks, a structured approach to risk mitigation is crucial.

One of the most effective ways to mitigate risk is to eliminate the hazard entirely. Engineering controls involve designing the workplace or modifying equipment to prevent exposure to hazards like Ventilation Systems**,** Machine Guarding, Noise Control etc.[15] Administrative controls are policies and procedures that aim to change worker behaviour to reduce risk, like job rotation and regular Safety Audits and Inspections. Besides this, PPE serves as the last line of defence when other control measures are insufficient. In the printing industry, PPE includes items like gloves, respirators, safety goggles, and hearing protection. The printing industry presents a variety of risks, ranging from chemical exposure to ergonomic strains and machinery-related hazards. Effective risk mitigation requires a multi-faceted approach that prioritizes elimination and engineering controls, supported by administrative measures and the correct use of PPE.

Technological advancements

The printing industry has undergone significant technological advancements in recent years, driven by automation, digitalization, and sustainability concerns. These innovations not only improve operational efficiency but also enhance safety and reduce health hazards for workers. Automated presses and Robotic arms are now being used to handle heavy paper rolls, eliminating the need for workers to perform heavy lifting, which reduces the risk of musculoskeletal disorders.[16] Digital printing uses water-based inks and toners, leading to a substantial reduction in VOC emissions, which can cause respiratory issues and other health problems.[17] Green printing technologies, like soy & water based inks, energy printing presses and use of recyclable non-toxic materials reducing the environmental and health impacts of the printing process.

CONCLUSION

The printing industry is on the cusp of a transformation, driven by automation, digitalization, and green printing technologies. These advancements not only enhance productivity and

sustainability but also significantly reduce health hazards for workers. However, the industry must navigate challenges related to emerging risks, the pace of technological change, and the need for continuous training. By embracing opportunities such as wearable technology and data analytics, the printing industry can create a safer and healthier future for its workforce.

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