

Original Article



Hotel housekeepers and occupational health: experiences and perceived risks

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Abbreviations

EU-OSHA: European Agency for Safety
and Health at Work; FG: focus groups; IPE:
individual protection equipment; MSD:
musculoskeletal disorders; PC: primary care.

ABSTRACT

Background: Hotel housekeepers are one of the most important occupational group within tourism hotel sector; various health problems related to their job have been described, above all musculoskeletal disorders. The objective of this study is to understand the experiences and perceptions of hotel housekeepers and key informants from the Balearic Islands (Spain) regarding occupational health conditions and the strategies employed to mitigate them.

Methods: A qualitative study was carried out. Six focus groups with hotel housekeepers and 10 semi-structured interviews with key informants were conducted. Next, we carried out a content analysis.

Results: Hotel housekeepers reported musculoskeletal disorders, anxiety and stress as main occupational health problems; health professionals underscored the physical problems. Hotel housekeepers perceived that their work (physically demanding and with repetitive movements) caused their health conditions. To solve health issues, they used medication (anti-inflammatory agents, painkillers, sedatives and anxiolytics), which allowed them to continue working; health public services, generally rated as satisfactory; individual protective equipment; ergonomics (with difficulties due to high work pace and hotel facilities) and physical activity. Two contrasting attitudes were identified regarding sick leave: HHs who refused to accept a doctor-prescribed sick leave (due to fear of being fired, sense of responsibility, ...), and those who accepted it (because they could not continue working, they prioritised health before work).

Conclusions: Our results might contribute to plan improvement strategies and programs to address health problems among hotel housekeepers. These programs should include interventions, such as coping strategies for the work-related risk factors (i.e., stress) and strategies to reduce medicine consumption. Additionally, hotel facilities should adopt policies focused on making workplaces more ergonomic (i.e., furniture) and to diminish the work pace.

Keywords: Hotel housekeepers; Occupational health; Qualitative research; Perceived health

BACKGROUND

Tourism-related jobs occupied 13.4% of the active population in Spain and 25.6% in the Balearic Islands in 2019. Within the tourism hotel sector, hotel housekeepers are one of the

