

The Influence of Workplace Injury Occurrences on Productivity. A Housekeeping Manager's Perspective

Keleabetswe K. Zitho^{1*} Tshepiso J. Setokoe² Dalene Crowther³ 

AFFILIATIONS

^{1,2&3}Department of Hospitality Management, Faculty of Management Sciences, Central University of Technology, Bloemfontein, South Africa

CORRESPONDENCE

Email: zithokk@gmail.com *

EDITORIAL INFORMATION

Received: 10 May 2025

Revised: 20 August 2025

Accepted: 23 August 2025

Published: 24 October 2025

Copyright:

© The Author(s) 2025.

Published by [ERRODF Forum](#) and distributed under Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY 4.0) licence.



DOI: 10.38140/ijms-2025.vol2.2.01

Abstract: This article aimed to investigate the influence of workplace injury occurrence on the productivity of housekeepers in graded hotels operating in the Free State province of South Africa. Drawing from an interpretive philosophical outlook, the study employed a qualitative research approach. To gather data that would address the research questions, the study utilised semi-structured interviews with a non-probability, purposefully selected sample of 13 housekeeping managers from graded hotels in the Free State province. The collected data was thematically analysed, which enabled the formulation of two themes and a sub-theme. The findings, as narrated by the respondents, indicated how injuries hindered housekeepers from performing their duties, leading to absenteeism, increased workload for the remaining staff, and fear of injury. These factors ultimately affect productivity, thereby compromising the establishments' ability to provide customer satisfaction, viability, profitability, and sustainability. Additionally, the findings highlighted that the fear employees experience due to injury occurrences often creates an anxious workforce, prompting them to seek alternative employment opportunities. This results in higher staff turnover, diminished experience within housekeeping, increased human resource costs, and negatively affects

productivity while compromising the level of service offered to guests. In conclusion, the study recommends that proactive risk mitigation strategies, the institutionalisation of comprehensive health and safety protocols, investment in ergonomic tools and training, and the cultivation of an empathetic and responsive organisational culture be made imperative for the wellbeing of housekeeping personnel.

Keywords: Workplace, injury occurrence, housekeeping, productivity, housekeeping managers.

1. Introduction

The nature of the housekeeping profession requires personnel to undertake tasks that expose them to occupational risks, including, but not limited to, physical and chemical harm. Occupational risk can be ambiguous in definition; however, this study aims to clarify the term, with Yanar et al. (2019) defining the phenomenon as “working conditions that expose employees to unsafe materials and tools, hazardous duties, and psychological impediments such as harassment and bullying in the workplace.” Given the nature of housekeeping and its primary objective of preparing guest rooms (Bhatnagar & Nim, 2019), the operational requirements necessitate that personnel position their bodies in ways that are often detrimental to their well-being (Wami et al., 2019), potentially resulting in injuries that affect their ability to continue performing their duties.

It is noteworthy that the potential strain on a person's well-being characterises the housekeeping profession. This strain can be attributed to the operational environment, including, but not limited to, housekeeping duties, the intensity of the work, and the considerably high workload, all of which increase personnel's exposure to hazards (Shapoval et al., 2022). The implied hazards are often viewed as ambiguous due to the lack of consensus on their definition; however, for the context of this investigation, the work of Huq et al. (2020) is used to define a hazard as “situations potentially

How to cite this article:

Zitho, K. K., Setokoe, T. J., & Crowther, D. (2025). The influence of workplace injury occurrences on productivity. A housekeeping manager's perspective. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Management Sciences*, 2(2), a01. <https://doi.org/10.38140/ijms-2025.vol2.2.01>

leading to fatalities, injuries, property damage, environmental harm, business disruptions, or other forms of loss.” These hazards can contribute to the occurrence of injuries that may compromise the ability of housekeeping personnel to perform their duties optimally.

In the South African context, the establishment of the Compensation for Occupational Injuries and Diseases Act 130 of 1993 (COIDA) introduced a system of no-fault compensation for employees who sustain injuries or contract diseases during their employment, or for the death of an employee resulting from such injuries or diseases. This has provided both employers and employees with a means to address injuries and diseases contracted by employees in the performance of their duties in a just and legal manner (Mushai, 2018). One would be forgiven for assuming that the availability of such a progressive piece of legislation would help reduce fatalities in the workplace. It is, therefore, unfortunate that SHA Risk Specialists (2024) report that an estimated 50% of registered businesses in South Africa are not compliant with the provisions of COIDA. SHA Risk Specialists (2024) further estimate that there are around 198,000 workplace injuries and approximately 22,000 occupational diseases contracted annually in South Africa. It should be noted that, although there are no official statistics on injury occurrences in South Africa, housekeeping within the accommodation sector constitutes a considerable number of such occurrences (Singer, 2023). The alarming figure of 220,000 is suggested not to accurately reflect workplace injury occurrences, as research indicates a significant underreporting of such events, with only about 25% being officially reported (SHA Risk Specialists, 2024). The background provided above underscores the need for an investigation of this nature to be conducted. While the situation described makes the study relevant to the country as a whole, the Free State province plays an increasingly important role in the development of tourism and hospitality due to its central location, which connects the country in all directions, along with notable sports, cultural events, and attractions that draw tourists to the province (Free State, 2024). This has led to an increased demand for accommodation, thereby heightening the need for housekeeping and the potential for injury occurrences related to the occupation.

1.1 Problem statement

The exposure of hotel housekeeping personnel to injuries has recently raised concerns about the ability of hotel management to address this issue (Xie et al., 2020). This topic has become a subject of discussion among academia, government, and business due to the prevalence of occupational injuries that hotel housekeeping personnel endure. The situation is further complicated by South Africa’s lack of statistics and reporting on the occurrence of injuries in the housekeeping environment of the accommodation sector. Such prevalence underscores the need for scientific inquiry aimed at understanding and mitigating injury occurrences within the housekeeping sphere, thereby ensuring that productivity is not compromised. This study intends to investigate the influence of injury occurrences on the productivity of housekeeping in graded hotels operating in the Free State province of South Africa.

1.1.1 Research question

The following research question was formulated to provide directions to the study:

- What is the influence of injury occurrence on the productivity of housekeeping in graded hotels operating in the Free State province of South Africa?

2. Theoretical Framework

Following extensive reading on the phenomenon, the researchers deemed it appropriate to ground the investigation in a theoretical framework based on the domino theory of accidental causation. This theory was first introduced by Heinrich in 1931; however, it did not account for the influence of management (Wibowo et al., 2020) until it was later revised by Bird and Loftus in 1974 (Famakin et al., 2020). The theory posits that the occurrence of injuries in the workplace (whether accidental or not) often results from the relationship between employees and their social environment, faults

committed by personnel, unsafe acts undertaken due to deviations from protocols or a lack thereof, the occurrence of accidents, and the costs and impacts of accidents on productivity (Hosseinian & Torghabeh, 2012; Ahn et al., 2021), as depicted in Figure 1 below.

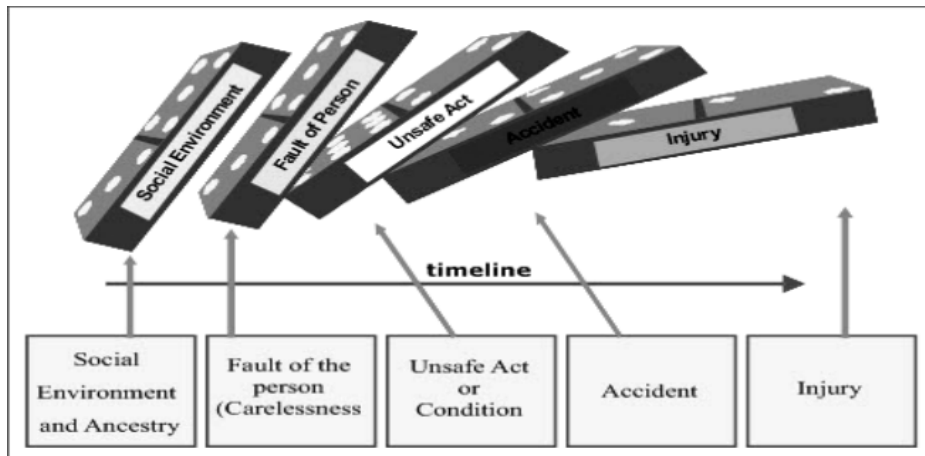


Figure 1: Domino theory of accident causation

The model developed by Heinrich in 1932 illustrates the domino effect in the sequence of workplace injuries, emphasising how one unsafe act or condition can trigger a chain of events leading to accidents (Hosseinian & Torghabeh, 2012).

The relevance of employing the domino theory in investigating this phenomenon can be seen in the assertions made by authors such as Hsieh et al. (2017) and Adams et al. (2020), who characterise the housekeeping division of accommodation establishments as the single largest occupational category, with personnel who are particularly vulnerable to workplace hazards and chronic health disorders and injuries. The frequency of such occurrences can be attributed to the domino effect associated with the environmental nature of the housekeeping profession (Abubakar, 2017). This attribution is evident in the housekeeping profession, which is often regarded as a low-skilled occupation lacking opportunities for capacity building (Hasnat, 2021). Such neglect places housekeeping personnel in a precarious situation, operating in an environment susceptible to chemical, biological, and ergonomic risks, with little or no training (Chela-Alvarez et al., 2022). Consequently, this environment can give rise to a cascading effect, as elucidated by Heinrich's theory, as illustrated above.

2.1 Overview of literature on workplace injury occurrences within housekeeping

The tourism industry comprises various sectors. Within this industry, the hospitality sector has proven to be the most labour-intensive, substantial, and fastest-growing (Raja Omar et al., 2020). This sector is crucial for providing accommodation and catering to the travelling masses, with accommodation being central to its operations. The operations of the accommodation sub-sector depend on various functions, with housekeeping being the most common, irrespective of the size, type, and star rating of the establishment (Shahane & Fernandes, 2021). This operational function is responsible for ensuring a clean environment, which is not only good for business but also a necessity for the safety and well-being of patrons (Bhatnagar & Nim, 2019). The housekeeping department is seen as the hub of centrality in its ability to work in close collaboration with other departments within an accommodation establishment (Jayanti, 2023).

The department is typically overseen by housekeepers, sometimes referred to as housemaids, room cleaners, or housemen, who play a key role in maintaining the cleanliness of guest rooms, public areas, and back areas while creating a welcoming environment for guests (Nimri et al., 2020). These professionals perform tasks that include, but are not limited to, cleaning guest rooms using

chemicals, changing linens, and restocking supplies (Jayanti, 2023). Unfortunately, the fast-paced environment of this occupation brings with it unsavoury performance requirements, including uncomfortable postures, forceful movements, repeated motions, heavy lifting, exposure to chemical fumes, and environmental hazards that can negatively impact one's health (Hsieh et al., 2017). Despite the myriad of accommodation establishments, the common challenges faced by housekeeping personnel often include backache and pain in the arms, legs, neck, shoulders, hands, fingers, and feet, which are the symptoms most frequently reported (Abubakar, 2017). In addition to the physical risks to which housekeeping personnel are exposed, a study by Cardoso et al. (2024) highlights a compound of vulnerabilities related to workload, remuneration, and stress caused by stressors such as bullying and harassment, including sexual harassment. Although housekeeping and its personnel significantly contribute to the operations of an accommodation establishment, their well-being is not given proper attention, with an apparent lack of assistance, health benefits, and the right tools or capacity to enable them to perform their duties in a safe environment (Hsieh et al., 2017).

Workplace environments around the world have seen a considerable increase in the number of injuries and illnesses suffered by personnel while performing their duties. While countless economic sectors are prone to workplace injuries, no sector's plight can be dismissed as minor. However, a contextual examination of injury occurrence in the accommodation sub-sector of the hospitality sector deserves even closer scrutiny. As previously indicated, the housekeeping department of accommodation establishments is often considered particularly vulnerable to hazardous performance requirements that frequently result in injuries, rendering personnel unable to perform their duties.

2.2 Influence of injury occurrences on the productivity of housekeeping personnel

Businesses often find themselves at a disadvantage due to morbidity and loss of productivity caused by occupational injuries (de Bienassis et al., 2021). Such incidents often incur health and safety costs, including workers' compensation, risk management, diminished productivity, overtime remuneration for uninjured workers replacing injured workers, recruitment and training of replacement workers, injury management costs, temporary disability, and litigation and disability settlements (Begasse de Dhaem et al., 2024). These incidents often lead to compromised productivity output within the organisation (Tavitiyaman et al., 2022).

Productivity within an organisation is typically measured by the performance of individuals tasked with responsibilities that contribute to the organisation's overall objectives (Simpao, 2018; Kaydos, 2020). The phenomenon of performance frequently becomes a topic of debate due to a lack of consensus among stakeholders and communities of practice. However, in the context of this study, Muntazeni and Indrayanto (2018) define job performance as activities characterised by a range of outcomes that stakeholders (employees) are expected to achieve based on objectives set by the organisation's management. The unmanaged occurrence of workplace injuries disrupts the seamless productivity of employees (as per the definition above), creating challenges that hinder the organisation's ability to achieve its objectives of customer satisfaction, viability, and sustainability.

2.2.1 Absenteeism, reduced output and work overload on remaining staff

The occurrence of injuries in the workplace should not be viewed merely as unfortunate incidents that happen in isolation within a particular workstation (Spellman, 2023). Such injuries often have a profound effect on an organisation, as they can set off a chain reaction that impacts the productivity and morale of employees (Musyoki, 2024). Scholars such as Odebiyi and Okafor (2023) have indicated that injuries occurring at workstations extend far beyond the physical wounds inflicted on the injured; they engulf the workplace environment, thereby altering team composition, work behaviour, and productivity. These occurrences often give rise to various challenges for the

productivity of the functional unit (housekeeping), including, but not limited to, reduced employee availability (absenteeism) and increased costs for employers. The effects mentioned above will be elaborated upon in the section to follow.

Disruptions arising from absent employees due to occupational injury can lead to significant changes in the dynamics governing the team and its productivity (Gubler et al., 2018). This supports the adage, “an injury to one is an injury to all,” as the incapacity of an employee due to workplace injury does not just affect the injured party (Am, 2021), but the entire team, placing an additional burden of work on the shoulders of the uninjured employees who must take on the tasks normally assigned to the absent member (de Bienassis et al., 2021). Additional workloads imposed on the remaining team members are not always welcome, as they often come without any remuneration, especially in low-skilled, low-paying occupations such as housekeeping (Botelho, 2023).

The lengthy absence of injured workers often creates instability within the team, resulting in anxiety and stress for the remaining team members (Alliger et al., 2015). This can be attributed to disruptions in the workflow and project timelines, as there is a need to redistribute or postpone tasks (Gubler et al., 2018). Such adjustments may lead to fluctuations in productivity due to the team’s struggle to cope with the new workload, thereby compromising already challenged team morale (Alliger et al., 2015).

Prolonged absenteeism from work due to workplace injuries affects not only physical health but also has an emotional impact on both the injured and other employees. According to Vogt et al. (2025), the emotional consequences of being absent from work due to a workplace injury often leave employees feeling insecure and fearful. Such feelings may raise concerns about workplace safety and the potential for injuries, as well as economic security regarding their jobs, which can lead to serious repercussions (Probst, 2016). Consequently, the anxiety caused by the possibility of sustaining injuries can erode employee trust in the organisation’s commitment to their safety and wellbeing, resulting in disengagement and demotivation (Obuobisa-Darko, 2022). As a result, this can lead to an overall decline in team productivity, resulting in low performance and moderate outcomes for the organisation (Ahmed et al., 2020), thereby compromising profitability, viability, and sustainability.

3. Research Methodology

The study aimed to investigate the perspectives of housekeeping managers on the influence of work injury occurrences on the productivity of housekeepers in graded hotels in the Free State province of South Africa. Given the study's setting and intended population, it was preferable to adopt a subjective outlook within an interpretive paradigm, which rejects the belief in a single verifiable reality (Pervin & Mokhtar, 2022). This established the foundation for an exploratory examination of the impact of injury occurrences on the productivity of housekeepers in graded hotels in the Free State. Consequently, the study sought to investigate the influence of injury occurrences on housekeeping productivity while also aiming to recommend ways to reduce the prevalence of such injuries, thereby ensuring optimal productivity within housekeeping departments in the research setting.

A non-probability purposive sampling technique enabled the researchers to engage 13 housekeeping managers from graded hotels in the Free State, who provided insights into the phenomenon under investigation. The interviews focused on how the productivity of housekeeping personnel is affected by the occurrence of injuries related to the tasks they perform while executing their duties. In the study’s intentional pursuit of addressing the research questions, the interviews were conducted for durations ranging from 20 to 40 minutes. Following the data collection effort, the data were transcribed and thematically analysed using the Braun and Clarke (2021) method of qualitative data analysis. This empowered the researchers to formulate themes that would allow the study to present

its findings and facilitate a discussion that could produce new knowledge, make recommendations, and highlight avenues for future research.

The study made intentional and concerted efforts to ensure that the ethical integrity of investigations of this nature was upheld. This was achieved by applying for ethical clearance from the Central University of Technology's Faculty of Management Sciences Research Ethics Committee (FMSEC11821). Upon satisfying institutional ethical requirements, the researchers ensured that respondents received a consent form clearly outlining their rights, the voluntary nature of their participation in the study, their right to withdraw without notice, and the guarantee of confidentiality and privacy, which was maintained through the use of pseudonyms (Respondent 1, 2, 3, etc.).

4. Presentation of Findings

The study aimed to investigate managers' perspectives on the influence of injury occurrences on the productivity of housekeeping personnel in graded hotels in the Free State province. This led the study to follow a qualitative research process, wherein data was collected through semi-structured interviews with purposefully selected respondents and thematically analysed to address the previously formulated research questions. Following this methodological approach, the analysed data enabled the study to develop and generate themes that reflect housekeeping managers' perspectives on the impact of injury occurrences on the productivity of housekeeping staff in graded hotels in the Free State. The generated themes and sub-themes (presented in brackets) include (i) reduced output due to absenteeism (work overload for non-injured personnel) and (ii) fear of injury leading to staff turnover.

4.1 Theme 1: Reduced output due to absenteeism

The prevalence of injury among housekeeping personnel is often regarded as a natural aspect of the profession. As a result, housekeeping staff frequently experience workplace injuries, which can prevent them from reporting for duty after such incidents. These occurrences tend to have far-reaching consequences for productivity, leaving management and remaining employees with the significant task of maintaining productivity levels with insufficient human resources. Interviews with housekeeping managers revealed that injuries often lead to employee absences, thereby reducing productivity, compromising the quality of service, and ultimately affecting the hotel's viability, profitability, and sustainability. These sentiments are supported by the accounts of the respondents that follow:

"The nature of the job comes with a requirement for employees to perform tasks that can put undue strain on the employees' bodies. For example, I recently had one of my staff report to me that she sprained her back lifting a mattress during a routine room change. The pain I saw in that woman's face led me to tell her to seek medical help, which meant that she was immediately off duty, when the shift still had a good 5 hours to go. What made matters worse for the team was receiving a medical certificate excusing her from work for a week." (Respondent 9)

"This job is arguably the most dangerous job I know. A week never goes by without receiving a report of someone injured on duty. People come to me with injuries like neck pain, waist pain, shoulder pain, and back pain. Unfortunately, tasks such as lifting furniture, pushing heavy trolleys and extending the body into strenuous positions are part of the job of a housekeeping employee. When such things happen, I know that I will be short-staffed, and sometimes that even requires that put a housekeeping uniform and forget about being a manager." (Respondent 3)

"One beautiful morning turned into every housekeeping manager's nightmare when 5 staff members inhaled a chemical that left them with breathing difficulties on the same

shift. You can only imagine the chaos and hurried crisis control we had to do. Our first port of call was the off-duty staff members who were not all available. Next option was to call on our regular temps who are not always readily available at short notice, not to mention some of them telling you that they don't have transport fare to get to the hotel. Did I mention that this happened during one of our busiest times? We ended up asking other divisions to lend us staff members who are not even trained in the trade.” (Respondent 13)

A lot of times people focus on physical injuries sustained by housekeeping staff. I do acknowledge the prevalence of physical injuries, but the psychological injuries suffered by housekeeping staff is not given sufficient attention. Most housekeeping staff are female who often find themselves in rooms with guests who have no scruples and attempt to take advantage of them. The reports we receive as housekeeping managers of solicitation of sexual favours from our staff are scary. This causes injuries of a psychological nature, which causes anxiety and can lead to depression and other mental health challenges. Now, imagine having to deal with a reduced staff component because of such.” (Respondent 2)

The narrative presented by the findings indicates that injuries occurring within the housekeeping environment often prevent employees from performing their occupational responsibilities, which can result in absenteeism and consequently compromise productivity and output. The findings are therefore consistent with the theoretical framework employed by the study, the domino theory of accidental causation. This theory, first promulgated by Heinrich in 1931, posits that the occurrence of injuries in the workplace (accidental or otherwise) is likely to negatively impact productivity within the housekeeping department (Hosseinian & Torgbah, 2012; Ahn et al., 2021). Additionally, the findings align with the work of scholars such as Odebiyi and Okafor (2023), who assert that injuries occurring at workstations extend far beyond the physical wounds inflicted on the injured, affecting the workplace environment and altering team composition, work behaviour, and productivity. The narrative presented by these scholars further confirms claims made by Alliger et al. (2015), indicating that the absence of workers due to injury can place an additional burden on the remaining members of the housekeeping department, often leaving them anxious about the challenges that lie ahead, especially if the absence of the injured workers is prolonged.

4.1.1 Sub-theme 1.1: Work overload for non-injured personnel

One of the direct consequences of injury occurrences in the workplace is the injured employees' inability to continue performing the tasks assigned to them. Unfortunately, such occurrences happen in environments that need continuity, thereby subjecting the remaining members of the team to an increased workload with the sole purpose of ensuring that productivity remains at the same level to ensure that customers receive services that are commensurate with the money they spend on the establishment's offerings. Such a narrative has seen respondents present a picture of a fatigued workforce, which is also said to suffer from compromised morale. The narrative presented by the respondents has been chronicled in the following manner:

“The stories I can tell you about being understaffed will make you run for the hills. Being responsible for housekeeping is one of the most difficult jobs I have ever done. Whenever someone is absent, be it because of injury or any other reason, our planning goes out the window. Those who are present are expected to go the extra mile. This extra mile often involves people doing jobs normally done by more than one person. In such instances, the pressures of productivity often see staff members cut corner, which ultimately does the hotel a disservice as customers are left dissatisfied with the services they receive.” (Respondent 7)

“An incomplete team brings with it its own challenges. When someone is absent, the staff on duty often perform the tasks assigned to them hurriedly without exercising caution,

which often places them at risk of injury as well. In addition, the work overload is also something that leaves them tired, which can also lead to more absenteeism, which can further compound the problem at hand. Injury occurrences often have far-reaching and unintended outcomes for the housekeeping department.” (Respondent 6)

“The service offered by our department is integral to the operation of the property. Much as front office is the face of the hotel, housekeeping is the face of cleanliness. The responsibility that rests on our shoulders requires a full complement of staff. This makes the saying – the beat goes on – true, because no matter what happens, the rooms, the corridors, the general areas need to be guest ready at all times. When a member of this integral team is down, the others must soldier on. At times like that, workloads and shift often double, and that is not always fair, but that’s what needs to happen.” (Respondent 8)

The need for continuity that characterises housekeeping operations makes instances of injury a significant concern for housekeeping managers and housekeepers. An occurrence of workplace injuries does not absolve the remaining team members of their responsibilities in the absence of the injured employee. These sentiments lend credibility to findings that confirm Mammen's (2017) assertions of housekeeping's responsibility to meet guests' requirements, irrespective of the challenges faced by the hotel and department. The findings further affirm that workplace injuries lead to changes in the dynamics that managers must navigate regarding the assignment of duties to a reduced workforce and an anxious team faced with an increased workload (Gubler et al., 2018) due to the unavailability of injured employees. This often places management in a position where they feel compelled to require housekeeping employees to undertake duties that exceed what is permissible, both in terms of time and workload, often without compensation (Mammen, 2017). Such practices have become normalised within the housekeeping environment, resulting in employees feeling fearful of management and concerned for the security of their employment.

4.2 Theme 2: Fear of injury leading to staff turnover

According to the respondents, injuries in the housekeeping departments of hotels are a common occurrence. This raises questions about the effect of these injuries on the psyche of the employees. Respondents recount the fear often exhibited by employees, especially after they experience an injury – regardless of the type – or witness a co-worker getting injured on the job. They share such:

“One day I was busy in my office, and I was called to bring the first aid kit to attend to an injured staff member. Upon inquiry, it was reported that the employee sustained a terrible cut that left her with a gushing wound. The amount of blood I saw on the day left me traumatized. There was another incident where a staff member was pricked in the hand by a needle in the dustbin. It caused such panic as no one could be sure of the possible transmission that can result from such exposure.” (Respondent 5)

“I have only been a manager for a year. During my days as a housekeeper, I have seen people become exposed to chemicals that have compromised the quality of their lives. This has left me scared to use the cleaning materials provided by the hotel. Unfortunately, that experience is not unique to anyone in this space. Seeing people, you know, get sick from their tools of trade would put fear in anyone, irrespective of their position.” (Respondent 12)

“It is never easy to see people get injured doing the exact same job as you do. That makes you wonder when your turn is going to come. People become anxious when they feel threatened. The fractures, broken bones, bleeding, and occasional chemical burns and exposures can take a toll on a person and create fear. Injuries happening in this department are scary.” (Respondent 11)

The findings narrated by respondents indicate a real threat of stress and fear caused by employees experiencing and witnessing injury occurrences at their workstations. This narration supports the works of scholars such as Wong et al. (2021) and Chen et al. (2020), who indicate that a stressed and fearful workforce can be costly to both the organisation and the employees. This is further corroborated by Schwepker and Dimitriou (2021) and Park and Min (2020), who proclaim an association between the fear of injury and employee job satisfaction, often leading to diminished productivity and the intention to leave not only the job but the industry entirely. The narrative provided by respondents further illustrates workplace injuries as one of the major reasons for employee turnover (Park & Min, 2020; Yasami et al., 2024). Such occurrences often trigger fears that cause employees to experience job distress, which can lead to withdrawal and disengagement from active participation in their work roles, with the sole intention of protecting their physical, psychological, and emotional well-being (Yasami et al., 2024). This often results in decreased productivity levels within the department.

The fear created by employees experiencing and witnessing injuries within the housekeeping environment of hotels affects the productivity of the units, giving rise to ripple effects that impact other areas of productivity. These ripple effects can manifest for the establishments in the form of severely decreased learning curves, which can be attributed to high levels of staff turnover, thereby increasing human resources costs, including the training of replacement employees (Martinelli, 2017). While the chaos of losing experienced personnel and training replacements unfolds, productivity expectations do not cease, as anything less than satisfactory performance compromises service quality, customer satisfaction, and the reputation of the establishment (Jayanti, 2023). The narrative that establishes the validity of the discussion above has prompted respondents to declare the influence of injury occurrences on the productivity of housekeeping personnel in the following manner:

"Your question can be answered by a quick walk around the department. You will notice that many of the employees in the department are people of mature age. We lose a lot of young people, and upon their exit interviews they indicate a variety of reason with injuries and fear of injuries coming up a lot." (Respondent 12)

"You need to understand that the things staff see in this department can sometimes be traumatic. We once had a young lady who was harassed and almost assaulted by a guest. She reported the matter and went straight to the change rooms, changed out of her uniform and left. Needless to say, she was one of my best workers." (Respondent 4)

"The greatest challenge with productivity in an environment prone to workplace injuries is retaining talent. The property attracts a lot of people who you can see are good at their jobs. We then invest a lot of resources into the development of their skills, and then they become subjected to injuries of a physical, chemical, environmental and psychological nature. In my years as an employee in the accommodation sector, I have heard of happenings in housekeeping, but nothing could have prepared me for the reality." (Respondent 10)

The findings present a grim illustration of the accommodation sub-sector of the hospitality sector. This is reflected in the common narrative expressed by respondents, highlighting the fear and stress caused by workplace injuries in the housekeeping environment. This narrative supports the assertions made by Rohit & Milan (2023) regarding the hospitality sector's inability to address the challenges of high employee turnover rates and low staff retention due to various issues, including but not limited to workplace safety, with workplace injuries being a significant concern. Furthermore, this narrative reinforces Obuobisa-Darko's (2022) observations of diminishing employee trust in the organisation's commitment to their safety and wellbeing, which is triggered by anxiety stemming from both experiencing and witnessing workplace injury occurrences. This state of affairs supports Shapoval et al.'s (2022) argument that the fear and stress caused by workplace

injuries place such strain on employees that they are negatively affected to the extent of developing work attitudes that may lead to decisions to withdraw from what they perceive as imminent danger. Such conditions create a fertile ground for employees not to perform at their optimal level, thereby negatively influencing the productivity of the housekeeping environment.

5. Conclusion

This study has shed light on the profound and multifaceted influence of workplace injury occurrences on the productivity of housekeeping personnel in graded hotels in the Free State province. By adopting an interpretivist paradigm and engaging directly with housekeeping managers, the research has uncovered a vivid narrative of systemic strain, where injuries – whether physical, psychological, chemical, or environmental – disrupt not only individual performance but also the collective functionality and morale of housekeeping departments. The findings support the applicability of Heinrich's Domino Theory of accident causation, indicating that workplace injuries frequently result from a combination of unsafe conditions, management deficiencies, and environmental stressors, which ultimately lead to injuries that can cause diminished productivity, increased absenteeism, emotional distress, and staff attrition.

The study further highlights a critical oversight in occupational health prioritisation within the hospitality sector, particularly among frontline, low-skilled personnel who form the backbone of the guest experience. Housekeeping personnel are demonstrably vulnerable, not merely due to the physical demands of their role but also because of insufficient institutional safeguards, inadequate training, and limited psychosocial support. The resulting absenteeism, work overload on non-injured staff, and increased turnover not only erode service quality and guest satisfaction but also undermine the long-term sustainability and profitability of hotel operations. Addressing these challenges requires a paradigmatic shift in how hotel management perceives and manages occupational health within housekeeping. Proactive risk mitigation strategies, the institutionalisation of comprehensive health and safety protocols, investment in ergonomic tools and training, and the cultivation of an empathetic and responsive organisational culture are imperative. Moreover, rigorous compliance with legislative frameworks such as COIDA must be non-negotiable. Ultimately, the productivity of housekeeping departments is inextricably linked to the health, safety, and dignity of their workers. Fostering a safe and supportive workplace is not only a moral imperative but also a strategic necessity for the advancement and resilience of the hospitality sector. Lastly, for a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of injury occurrences on the productivity of housekeeping personnel, a deeper investigation can be undertaken to explore the phenomenon from a quantitative research approach, focusing on housekeepers' perspectives and experiences of injury occurrences within the working environment.

6. Declarations

Author Contributions: Conceptualisation (K.K.Z., T.J.S. & D.C.); Literature review (K.K.Z., T.J.S. & D.C.); methodology (T.J.S.); software (N/A.); validation (N/A); formal analysis (K.K.Z., T.J.S. & D.C.); investigation (K.K.Z., T.J.S. & D.C.); data curation (K.K.Z., T.J.S. & D.C.) drafting and preparation (K.K.Z., T.J.S. & D.C.); review and editing (K.K.Z., T.J.S. & D.C.); supervision (N/A); project administration (K.K.Z., T.J.S. & D.C.); funding acquisition (N/A). All authors have read and approved the published version of the article.

Funding: This research did not receive any external funding.

Acknowledgements: The authors acknowledge the respondents who participated in turning an idea into a study aimed at contributing to knowledge.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Data Availability: The data are not publicly available due to confidentiality agreements with participants and ethical restrictions imposed by the Institutional Review Board. However, de-identified data can be made available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request, subject to approval by the ethics committee.

References

- Abubakar, R. (2017). *Influence of occupational hazards on employees' job performance in housekeeping department of budget hotels in Kaduna metropolis, Nigeria* [Unpublished master's dissertation]. Kenyatta University.
- Adams, M., Li, W. V., Saylor, K., & Rosenberg, M. A. S. (2020). Interventions to promote hotel workers' health: A scoping review. *American Journal of Industrial Medicine*, 63(12), 1095–1103. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ajim.23190>
- Ahmed, T., Khan, M. S., Thitivesa, D., Siraphattada, Y., & Phumdara, T. (2020). Impact of employee engagement and knowledge sharing on organisational performance: Study of HR challenges in the COVID-19 pandemic. *Human Systems Management*, 39(4), 589–601. <https://doi.org/10.3233/HSM-201052>
- Ahn, Y. J., Yu, Y. U., & Kim, J. K. (2021). Accident cause factor of fires and explosions in tankers using fault tree analysis. *Journal of Marine Science and Engineering*, 9(8), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.3390/jmse9080844>
- Alliger, G. M., Cerasoli, C. P., Tannenbaum, S. I., & Vessey, W. B. (2015). Team resilience: How teams flourish under pressure. *Organizational Dynamics*, 44(3), 176–184. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.orgdyn.2015.05.003>
- Am, S. (2021). Occupational health hazards in the hospitality industry and their prevention. *Egyptian Journal of Occupational Medicine*, 45(1), 65–80. <http://dx.doi.org/10.21608/ejom.2021.143334>
- Begasse de Dhaem, O., Foster-Chang, S., Chandrashekar, B., Chigirinsky, G., D'souza, T., Helmy, N. M., & Serra, S. (2024). Worker's compensation injury and illness care: A global round table. *Workplace Health & Safety*, 72(4), 124–130.
- Bhatnagar, E., & Nim, D. (2019). Impact of housekeeping services and practices on customer satisfaction and repeat business. *Prabandhan: Indian Journal of Management*, 12(8), 46–57. <https://doi.org/10.17010/pijom/2019/v12i8/146417>
- Botelho, B. D. C. (2023). *Why is it so difficult to retain and maintain talent in hospitality and tourism organizations* [Unpublished master's dissertation]. University Institute of Lisbon.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2021). One size fits all? What counts as quality practice in (reflexive) thematic analysis? *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 18(3), 328–352. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2020.1769238>
- Cardoso, V. D. F., Moriguchi, C. S., & Sato, T. D. O. (2024). Sociodemographic, occupational, and health profile of Brazilian housekeepers and house cleaners – A hypothesis-generating study. *Journal of Environmental and Occupational Health Policy*, 34(3), 213–223. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10482911241276377>
- Chela-Alvarez, X., Bulilete, O., Garcia-Illan, E., Vidal-Thomàs, M., & Llobera, J. (2022). Hotel housekeepers and occupational health: Experiences and perceived risks. *Annals of Occupational & Environmental Medicine*, 34, 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.35371/aoem.2022.34.e29>
- Chen, C. C., Zou, S. S., & Chen, M. H. (2022). The fear of being infected and fired: Examining the dual job stressors of hospitality employees during COVID-19. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 102, 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2021.103131>
- de Bienassis, K., Slawomirski, L., & Klazinga, N. (2021). The economics of patient safety Part IV: Safety in the workplace: Occupational safety as the bedrock of resilient health systems. *OECD Health Working Papers*, 130, 1–101.
- Famakin, I. O., Aigbavboa, C., & Molusiwa, R. (2020). Exploring challenges to implementing health and safety regulations in a developing economy. *International Journal of Construction Management*, 1(1), 1–35. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15623599.2020.1850201>

- Free State. (2024). *Free State province investment prospectus*. <https://www.freestateonline.fs.gov.za/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Free-State-Province-Investment-Prospectus-2024.pdf>
- Gubler, T., Larkin, I., & Pierce, L. (2018). Doing well by making well: The impact of corporate wellness programs on employee productivity. *Management Science*, 64(11), 4967-4987.
- Hasnat, Q. (2021). *An exploration of employee engagement and employee commitment in the London hotel sector: The perspectives of migrant housekeeping workers and their managers* [Unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Brighton].
- Heinrich, H. (1932). *Industrial accident prevention*. New York: McGraw Hill.
- Hendi, O. M., Abdulaziz, A. A., Althaqafi, A. M., Hindi, A. M., Khan, S. A., & Atalla, A. A. (2019). Prevalence of musculoskeletal disorders and its correlation to physical activity among health specialty students. *International Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 10(48), 19-24. https://doi.org/10.4103/ijpvm.IJPVM_436_18
- Hosseinian, S. S., & Torghebeh, Z. J. (2012). Major theories of construction accident causation models: A literature review. *International Journal of Advances in Engineering & Technology*, 4(2), 53-66.
- Hsieh, Y. C. J., Lemke, M. K., Sönmez, S., & Apostolopoulos, Y. (2017). Perceived workplace mistreatment: Case of Latina hotel housekeepers. *Work*, 56(1), 55-65. <https://doi.org/10.3233/WOR-162467>
- Huq, M., Shoeb, A. Z. M., Hossain, M. A., Fahad, S., Kamruzzaman, M. M., Javed, A., Saleem, N., Adnan, K. M., Sarker, S. A., Ali, M. Y., & Sarven, M. (2020). *Environment, climate, plant and vegetation growth* (1st ed.). Switzerland: Springer International Publishing.
- Jayanti, J. (2023). *Hotel housekeeping management: Changing trends and developments*. Goodfellow Publishers. <https://doi.org/10.2307/jj.28799932>
- Kaydos, W. (2020). *Operational performance measurement: Increasing total productivity*. Boca Raton: CRC Press.
- Liu, H. C., Cheng, Y., & Ho, J. J. (2020). Associations of ergonomic and psychosocial work hazards with musculoskeletal disorders of specific body parts: A study of general employees in Taiwan. *International Journal of Industrial Ergonomics*, 76, 1-8. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ergon.2020.102935>
- Mammen, R. (2017). *Assessment of physical workload, ergonomic problems and prevalence of pain among low wage hotel housekeepers in Orlando* [Unpublished master's dissertation]. University of Central Florida.
- Martineli, K. (2017). What are the consequences of poor health & safety procedures? <https://www.highspeedtraining.co.uk/hub/consequences-of-poor-health-safety-procedures/>
- Muntazeri, S., & Indrayanto, A. (2018). The impact of education, training, and work experience on job satisfaction and job performance. *Journal Akuntansi, Manajemen Dan Ekonomi*, 20(2), 50-69. <https://doi.org/10.32424/1.jame.2018.20.2.1226>
- Mushai, A. (2018). *Alternative funding options for occupational diseases in South African mines* [Unpublished doctoral thesis]. University of Witwatersrand.
- Musyoki, M. J. (2024). Ergonomics and work productivity in the Witwatersrand: A theoretical review. *International Journal of Advanced Multidisciplinary Research and Studies*, 4(3), 1477-1482. <https://doi.org/10.62225/2583049X.2024.4.3.2966>
- Nimri, R., Kensbock, S., Bailey, J., Jennings, G., & Patiar, A. (2020). Realising dignity in housekeeping work: Evidence from five-star hotels. *Journal of Human Resources in Hospitality & Tourism*, 19(3), 368-387. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15332845.2020.1737770>
- Obuobisa-Darko, T. (2022). Managing employees' health, safety and anxiety in a pandemic. *International Journal of Workplace Health Management*, 15(2), 113-130. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJWHM-09-2021-0178>
- Odebiyi, D. O., & Okafor, U. A. C. (2023). Musculoskeletal disorders, workplace ergonomics and injury prevention. In Khorhan, O. (Ed.), *Ergonomics: New insights* (pp. 1-29). IntechOpen.

- Park, J., & Min, H. K. (2020). Turnover intention in the hospitality industry: A meta-analysis. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 90, 1-11. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2020.102599>
- Pervin, N., & Mokhtar, M. (2022). The interpretivist research paradigm: A subjective notion of a social context. *International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development*, 11(2), 419-428. <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARPED/v11-i2/12938>
- Probst, T. M. (2016). Job insecurity: Implications for occupational health and safety. In S. T. Antoniou & C. Cooper (Eds.), *New directions in organizational psychology and behavioral medicine* (pp. 313-328). Routledge.
- Raja Omar, R. N., Nik Hashim, N. A. A., Zain, E. N. M., Ramlee, S. I. F., Abdul Halim, A. F., Mohd Rohzi, A. F., Nor Azlin, M. H. A., & Wat Mat, W. M. N. (2020). Factors that influence online behaviour in purchasing hotel rooms via websites among tourists. *European Journal of Molecular & Clinical Medicine*, 7, 219-229.
- Rohit, S. K., & Milan, S. (2023). Epidemiology of occupational injuries and hazards in Indian hospitality: A study report. *European Chemical Bulletin*, 12, 2586-259. <https://doi.org/10.48047/ecb/2023.12.si5a.0144>
- Schwepker, J. C. H., & Dimitriou, C. K. (2021). Using ethical leadership to reduce job stress and improve performance quality in the hospitality industry. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 94, 1-11. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2021.102860>
- SHA Risk Specialists. (2024, 9 February). Compensation for occupational injuries and diseases: Half of SA businesses non-compliant. *FA News*. <https://www.fanews.co.za/article/non-life/15/commercial/1006/compensation-for-occupational-injuries-and-diseases-half-of-sa-businesses-non-compliant/38776>
- Shahane, R., & Fernandes, M. (2021). To study the training program implemented by the housekeeping department for onboarding staff in a post-pandemic world and its impact on employee motivation. *Atithya: A Journal of Hospitality*, 8(1), 33-37.
- Shapoval, V., Sönmez, S., Hsieh, Y. C., & Apostolopoulos, Y. (2022). Occupational health and safety of immigrant hotel housekeepers. *Workplace Health & Safety*, 70(12), 566-573. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/21650799221090712>
- Simpao, K. J. S. (2018). Labour productivity measurement and control standards for hotels. *Journal of Service Science Research*, 10, 25-76. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12927-018-0002-1>
- Singer, J. (2023). *There are no accidents: The deadly rise of injury and disaster – who profits and who pays the price*. Simon & Schuster.
- Spellman, F. R. (2023). *Physical hazard control: Preventing injuries in the workplace*. Bernan Press.
- Tavitiyaman, P., Tsui, B., Chan, C. L. F., & Miu, H. W. (2022). Employee productivity of hotel room attendants: An input-output perspective. *International Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Administration*, 23(5), 959-986. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15256480.2021.1881941>
- Vogt, K. S., Baker, J., Morys-Edge, M., Kendal, S., Mizen, E., & Johnson, J. (2025). 'I think the first priority is physically safe first, before you can actually get psychologically safe': Staff perspectives on psychological safety in inpatient mental health settings. *Journal of Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing*, 32(2), 276-287. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jpm.13101>
- Wami, S. D., Dessie, A., & Chercos, D. H. (2019). The impact of work-related risk factors on the development of neck and upper limb pain among low wage hotel housekeepers in Gondar town, Northwest Ethiopia: Institution-based cross-sectional study. *Environmental Health and Preventive Medicine*, 24(1), 1-10. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12199-019-0779-7>
- Wibowo, T., Sukaryawan, I. M., & Hatmoko, J. U. D. (2020). Identifying causal factors of accidents related to working at height: A case study of a construction company. *Association for Computing Machinery Journal*, 3(1), 1-7. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3429789.3429792>
- Wong, A. K. F., Kim, S. S., Kim, J., & Han, H. (2021). How the COVID-19 pandemic affected hotel employee stress: Employee perceptions of occupational stressors and their consequences.

International Journal of Hospitality Management, 93, 1-10.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2020.102798>

Xie, C., Zhang, J., Chen, Y., Morrison, A. M., & Lin, Z. (2020). Measuring hotel employee perceived job risk: Dimensions and scale development. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 32(2), 1-37. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/IJCHM-01-2019-0022>

Yanar, B., Lay, M., & Smith, P. M. (2019). The interplay between supervisor safety support and occupational health and safety vulnerability on work injury. *Safety and Health at Work Journal*, 10(2), 172-179. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.shaw.2018.11.001>

Yasami, M., Phetvaroon, K., Dewan, M., & Stosic, K. (2024). Does employee resilience work? The effects of job insecurity on psychological withdrawal behaviour and work engagement. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Insights*, 7(5), 2862-2882. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JHTI-06-2023-0423>

Disclaimer: The views, perspectives, information, and data contained within all publications are exclusively those of the respective author(s) and contributor(s) and do not represent or reflect the positions of ERRCD Forum and/or its editor(s). ERRCD Forum and its editor(s) expressly disclaim responsibility for any damages to persons or property arising from any ideas, methods, instructions, or products referenced in the content.