OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH HAZARDS FACED BY WOMEN WORKERS IN AONLA PROCESSING ENTERPRISES: AN APPLICATION OF WISE METHODOLOGY

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Introduction: Indian food preservation industry is predominantly occupied with processed aonla products especially aonla preserve. Mainly small-medium enterprises (SMEs) are involved in preserve making employing women workers in pricking task. Workers in these SMEs are working in undesirable working conditions and poor working environment exposing them to a number of occupational health hazards especially work related musculo-skeletal disorders (WMSDs).

Objective: The present study aims at application of WISE (Work Improvement in Small Enterprises) methodology in preserve making SMEs to improve occupational safety and health of women workers.

Methods: Four aonla preserve making SMEs of Hisar District, Haryana were selected. The main content of the study were:

1. Introduction of WISE to owner and workers of enterprises.
2. Walk through survey using Wise checklist to evaluate working condition and working environment of preserve making enterprises.
3. Application of Rapid Upper Limb Assessment (RULA) to assess the exposure to risk for WMSDs on 30 women workers engaged in pricking task.
4. Strategic measure to overcome the problems.

Results: The common problems observed in these SMEs were: poorly organized workplaces, no proper workstation, poorly designed hand tool, inadequate lighting, ventilation and storage, poor hygienic conditions and no work-rest allowances. The pricking task was highly repetitive characterized by fast & repetitive movements of the upper extremities and involved awkward sitting posture with flexed neck, back and folded legs for prolonged time. As a result, the workers were showing symptoms of WMSDs as pain in wrist joint, shoulders, neck and back. The strategic measures as per WISE included: better organized workplaces and storage, development of proper workstation, introduction of efficient machinery, use of safety measures, improved posture, comfortable work environment and provision of work rest allowance.

Conclusion: Application of WISE methodology has proven effective in improving working condition and working environment which has shown positive impact in reducing occupational health problems of workers and has increased their productivity.

Key words: Aonla preserve; small- medium enterprises; occupational health hazards; WISE.