

Health Assessment of Child Workers in Barangay De La Paz, Biñan, Laguna

Research Paper No. 1999-04



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Abstract

This case study is a vital component of the OSHC Action Program on the elimination of child labor in the footwear manufacturing in Binan, Laguna. It is a contribution to the implementation of ILO Convention 182 on the Elimination of the Worst forms of Child Labor. The purpose of this study was to determine the health status of child laborers in Barangay De La Paz in Biñan, Laguna as well as to document and record the working conditions and safety hazards in small scale footwear manufacturing in these areas. Teams from the OSHC visited Purok 4 and 5 of Barangay De la Paz in Biñan, Laguna to conduct an evaluation of 14 pre-selected workplaces in the area, and at the same time, a medical team interviewed and examined 93 working children.

Safety audit of the workplaces showed that most working areas were in the living areas of the worker and their families, posing difficulty in terms of exposure for all members of the family. A variety of hazards were observed, i.e., chemical, physical, biologic and ergonomic stresses. The symptoms most often experienced by child workers during the course of their work were forgetfulness, headache, fatigue and irritability. On physical examination, 30% of children examined were found to have enlarged lymph nodes, usually indicating an on going bacterial or viral infection of the upper respiratory tract. In this connection, it is worth noting that Biñan has the highest prevalence of pulmonary tuberculosis (PTB) in the country, therefore a high index of suspicion for children infected with PTB should be entertained. Moreover, more than half

of the subjects were noted to be malnourished, thus the synergy between PTB, malnutrition and possible effects of solvent exposure were causes for concern.

The research team recommended that the proprietors of these workplaces and/or their managers be given instruction on basic occupational safety and health. In fact the research was immediately followed by training of trainers coming from the community, which was followed by a series of appreciation courses for the operators and families in Barangay de la Paz. Much of the content of the training modules were taken from the research findings. It was also recommended that attention be given to the nutritional and urgent medical needs of these children. Last, recommendations were given on the follow-up research agenda to further elucidate the health implications of footwear work on children and adults including: The long-term effects of exposure to solvents among footwear operators and workers. Improvement of productivity in the workplaces related to health and safety practices