

Pasma: an Occupational Perspective on a Traditional Illness

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Abstract

This study aims to define pasma as an occupational health concern in the context of conditions experienced by foundry workers. The 84 subjects were chosen purposively from metal foundries located around Metro Manila and nearby provincial areas. These are workers who were exposed to hot environment in their processes. Interview-type questionnaire were administered to the subjects to elicit personal data, occupational history, working hours, workplace perception, symptoms related to heat stress, and work habits and practices. The respondents were asked questions on their beliefs and understanding in the concept of pasma.

Regardless of educational attainment, almost all of the respondents (83 out of 84) believe in pasma. Many of the workers said that they learned of the concept of pasma from their parents or relatives (87%), co-workers (24%), friends (15%), and traditional medicine practitioners (herbularyos) (7%). The respondents mentioned a variety of symptoms they believe are associated with pasma. Sweaty palms and soles, trembling of hands, and profuse sweating were the most common responses. The wide variety of the responses of the subjects on the cause, symptoms and cure showed that there is no universal concept of pasma. In order to prevent having pasma, most of the workers who believe in this concept, avoid taking baths and washing their hands after work.

This study showed that traditional beliefs could greatly affect work habits and practices, which could compromise their health and safety. The challenge is for traditional beliefs such as pasma to be unlearned for an occupational

safety and health program to succeed. Thus, the formulation and implementation of any occupational safety and health programs should take into account such prevailing cultural biases in the workplace.