

RELEVANCE OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF NOM-035-STPS-2018 IN A SMALL COMPANY IN THE CONSTRUCTION SECTOR

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Abstract: Construction workers belong to an industry that is one of the main engines of the economies of the countries (INEGI, 2020); these workers are exposed to psychosocial risk factors (PSRFs), due to the high danger of their activities, faced by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Labor Organization (ILO/WHO, 1984). Therefore, the objective of this paper is to evaluate the relevance of the implementation of NOM-035-STPS-2018 in reducing PSRFs and improving the well-being of small business workers in the construction sector in Mexico. The methodology used to determine the research objective was conducted through a non-experimental cross-sectional descriptive study, with a sample of 47 workers, located in Mexico City, through Reference Guide II; in addition to Reference Guide V, "Worker Data" which compiles the sociodemographic data of workers, through descriptive and inferential analyses, through the Likert scale. Non-probabilistic, intentional or judgment sampling was used for sample selection. The main results derived from the responses to the reference guides suggested by NOM-035 were located at the global level of exposure to average risk, with 58.77%. The NOM-035 instrument allows the identification of aspects that invite the design of preventive and corrective measures to optimize the psycho-emotional well-being of workers.

Keywords: psychosocial risk factors, small business, Mexican construction industry, psycho-emotional well-being

JEL Classification: L74, J28

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Introduction

Construction workers belong to an industry that intervenes as the main actor in the growth of countries, especially those that are developing, exerting action in their economies by maintaining an influence in different branches of industrial sectors that intervene in the creation of jobs and investments, both private, public, national and foreign (INEGI, 2020).

The construction sector ranks sixth among the main economic sectors in Mexico, contributing 6.4% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2022 (INEGI, 2023), and has contributed more than 4.7 million jobs by the end of 2023 (INEGI, 2024). Being one of the sectors with the highest employability in Mexico, it also represents one of the sectors with the highest levels of possibility of incidents or harmful events for its workers, above other industries (Quiroz-Zamora, 2020); this is largely due to the intrinsic characteristics of the established tasks, which is related to the physical and psycho-emotional risks in construction workers.

The dangerousness of the industry is related to the physical and psycho-emotional risks that affect construction workers, related to psychosocial risk factors (PSRFs), which have been defined by the Secretariat of Labor and Social Welfare (STPS, for its acronym in Spanish) as “Those that can cause anxiety disorders, non-organic sleep-wake cycle and severe stress and adaptation, derived from the nature of the functions of the job, the type of work schedule and exposure to severe traumatic events or acts of workplace violence to the worker, due to the work performed” NOM-035-STPS-2018, numeral 4.7.

The STPS in Mexico has established the Mexican Official Standard 035 to analyze, identify and prevent psychosocial risk factors in the work environment, with the aim of mitigating the negative effects on workers and promoting a favorable organizational climate (STPS, 2018).

The importance of detecting PSRFs surfaces because 27% of construction workers suffer from stress, anxiety or depression due to workloads, accelerated pace and poor leadership, exacerbated by tight project delivery times (OSHA, 2022).

Construction workers face physical and mental risks due to frequent accidents. The World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Labor Organization (ILO) attribute this to exposure to psychosocial risk factors (PSRFs) and have urged authorities to intervene since 1984 to protect workers' well-being (ILO/WHO, 1984).

To address this problem in Mexico, the STPS obtained the pronouncement of the Official Mexican Standard 035, which involves detecting the FRPS indicated by the literature for workers on Mexican territory without considering their suitability for construction workers.

Therefore, the objective of this paper is to evaluate the relevance of the implementation of NOM-035-STPS-2018 for reducing FRPS present in the work environment and in improving the well-being of small company workers in the construction sector in Mexico.

Literature review

The literature review was of a mixed nature: automatic and manual. In the first case, online databases were used: LATINDEX, SciELO, APA, BASE, ABI/Inform Global and the Regional Online Information System for Scientific Journals of the Americas. In the manual search, pages from organizations interested in occupational safety and health were reviewed, guided by descriptors, individual and combined, and delimited by means of Boolean operators.

The beginning of the construction industry in Mexico dates to the colonization age; the evolution of the industry to the present day has undergone significant changes with globalization that transfers foreign investment for the development of the country through large-scale infrastructure projects such as refineries or airports where the construction sector grew by 17.9% in 2023 (INEGI, 2024).

The growth of the construction industry brings with it physical and psychological risks for workers, being one with the highest rate of physical accidents, including psycho-emotional ones that involve long working hours, unsafe conditions, poor leadership and mental strain. Until recently, many of these risks were not considered in Mexican legislation, but the ILO/WHO (1984) points out that incidents are caused by exposure to these risk factors.

In Europe, 45% of workers have reported that PSRFs have a direct negative effect on their mental health, being the second occupational health problem according to OSHA (2022). The “Second European Survey on New and Emerging Risks” (ESENER-2) of the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (2024) also places pressure due to working hours as the second most important risk factor. In Mexico, there are still no clear statistics on how PSRFs affect workers, or which ones are most present in the work environment.

However, it is of great importance to detect PSRFs in the workplace, which result from the appreciation of workers and affect workers psychologically, physically and socially with triggers such as: quantitative loads, accelerated work pace and long working hours (OSHA, 2022). Workers in the industry are exposed to these conditions due to tight schedules and labor pressure because construction projects are born with a completion date for their delivery.

The literature review on PSRFs and working conditions shows that there are high rates of accidents related to these in construction due to hazards and poor safety conditions (CMIC, 2023). These conditions also expose Colombian workers to stress, anxiety and depression (Rodríguez Uribe, 2023).

In Mexico, research shows the importance of addressing these factors for the benefit of optimizing workers' mental health (Murrieta Saavedra, 2020).

Research in Australia indicates that working conditions in construction, such as work overload and excessive demands, affect workers' performance and can lead to accidents, harming both employees and companies' profitability. Gallegos and Castillo (2022) in Ecuador point out that quantitative and mental workloads expose workers to pressure to meet forced deadlines. On the other hand, Morrison and Wears (2021) in the United States note that the impact of these workloads is because companies do not consider the economic losses resulting from the reduction in the

pace of work due to physical exhaustion from the workloads. Likewise, in Spain, the National Institute of Safety and Health at Work (ISTAS, n.d.) relates the limited control of the activities that construction workers have, and that results in the deterioration of their emotional health.

Emotional health is affected by the wear and tear that the influence of work brings to family relationships for Argentinian workers; Gabini (2020) states that when not managed properly, it means psycho-emotional wear and tear in the family and work environments for workers. In Spain, studies reveal that when these workers are pressured by their family responsibilities, the imperative need to balance work and family relations is unleashed (INSST, 2020). Negative family situations for Colombian women arise when family pressures combine with the need to balance work and family life, especially for those in low socioeconomic strata (Rodríguez et al., 2022). When negative family relationships exist, they lead to an imbalance between work and personal life, and work environments are affected by worker dissatisfaction due to limited growth opportunities (Ramírez Esparza et al., 2023). In Mexico, worker mobility in the construction industry, driven by the search for significant project opportunities, is restricted by project locations, contributing to job instability (Herrera, 2023).

Job instability exists not only due to the location of construction projects but also to the high turnover rates that induce the presence of PSRFs in construction workers; according to Brewer (2020), Mexico is one of the countries in Latin America with the highest labor turnover rates.

Working conditions increase PSRFs in construction workers and their negative consequences. Solís Baldomar (2022) reflects on the prevention of these risks and highlights that their prolongation deteriorates the health of Mexican workers. However, 50% of Mexican companies refuse to comply with NOM-035-STPS-2018 (Hernández, 2023), whose objective is to minimize PSRFs and prevent work accidents (MARQ, 2022).

This prevention of psychosocial risks in Mexico is developed using the instruments suggested by NOM-035; however, Littlewood-Zimmerman et al. (2020), state that it is imperative that evidence of the reliability and validity of the instruments continues to be provided, in three basic pillars about content, construct and criteria. In this regard, Mucharraz-Cano (2020) shows that the identification of risk factors is related to occupational damage due to the exposure of workers in the construction industry, which leads to professional burnout and the detriment of the physical and psycho-emotional health of workers (STPS, 2018).

NOM-035-STPS-2018 is designed to minimize PSRFs, but the studies by Patlán-Pérez (2020) indicate that its instruments only partially show the factors present in the workplace. Duarte Castillo and Vega (2021) suggest that the standard needs a thorough review to improve its effectiveness in dealing with risk factors that affect workers.

Research methodology

The methodology used to determine the research objective was through a non-experimental cross-sectional descriptive study. The sampling was probabilistic, intentional and convenient, as Martínez (2022) points out, where the selection is based on the judgment and credibility of the researcher. In addition, the inclusion criteria were stipulated for the workers surveyed who agreed to collaborate with the study; they were over 18 years of age and literate.

The sample selection consisted of 47 workers in the construction industry, who worked in a small construction company, to comply with the characteristics suggested in NOM-035, regarding the sample size for the application of Reference Guide II. These workers were doing fieldwork, and due to their vulnerable conditions, such as low education and scarce resources, most were not considered for the application of this type of tests, of which 100% were validated for the research.

Data collection was carried out by applying surveys at the facilities of the company located in Mexico City. It is essential to mention that the chosen company had characteristics that met the requirements of NOM-035, to apply the reference guides suggested in the said standard. It is also important to specify that the study was carried out with a small sample, so the results cannot be generalized, and NOM-035 must be considered, which is only applicable to workers on Mexican territory.

It should be noted that Reference Guidelines V and II, suggested by NOM-035-STPS-2018, are designed to collect the sociodemographic data of workers and to identify and analyze psychosocial risks, respectively. Reference Guide II of NOM-035-STPS-2018 applies only to workplaces with fewer than 50 employees and is designed to identify Psychosocial Risk Factors (PSRFs). It does not measure the organizational climate, as this is only applicable to companies with more than 50 employees. The guide consists of 46 items with 5 response options on a Likert scale (always, almost always, sometimes, almost never, never), covering 4 categories:

1. work environment,
2. factors inherent to the activity,
3. organization of work time,
4. leadership and relationships at work.

Once the data were collected, they were analyzed using a quantitative methodology, which is the research technique, and descriptive statistics as an analysis technique, through descriptive and inferential analyses.

Results

The application of the surveys using Reference Guide II, suggested by NOM-035-STPS-2018, shows that the guide was administered to 47 workers, indicating that data collection was obtained from the workers' responses. Figure 1 also shows the level of risk exposure in which the companies were located, at 58.77%. The importance of data collection for risk assessment and, consequently, for decision making in the implementation of risk mitigation strategies is highlighted.

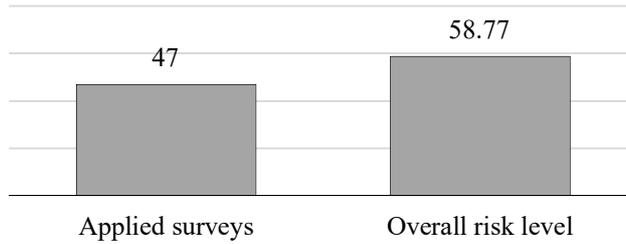


Figure 1. Category: work environment

Source: Own study based on research

Figure 2, shows a bar chart with percentages of sociodemographic conditions derived from the application of Reference Guide V, suggested by NOM-035, which shows the profile of the workers whose categories were evaluated:

- Male gender: 100%,
- Secondary education level: 47%,
- Type of personnel: 100%,
- Hiring by job or project: 94%,
- Work experience: 36%,
- Daytime work schedule: 100%,
- Absence of shift rotation: 100%.

Figure 2 is relevant because it provides a clear and quantitative view of the predominant characteristics in the analyzed sample.

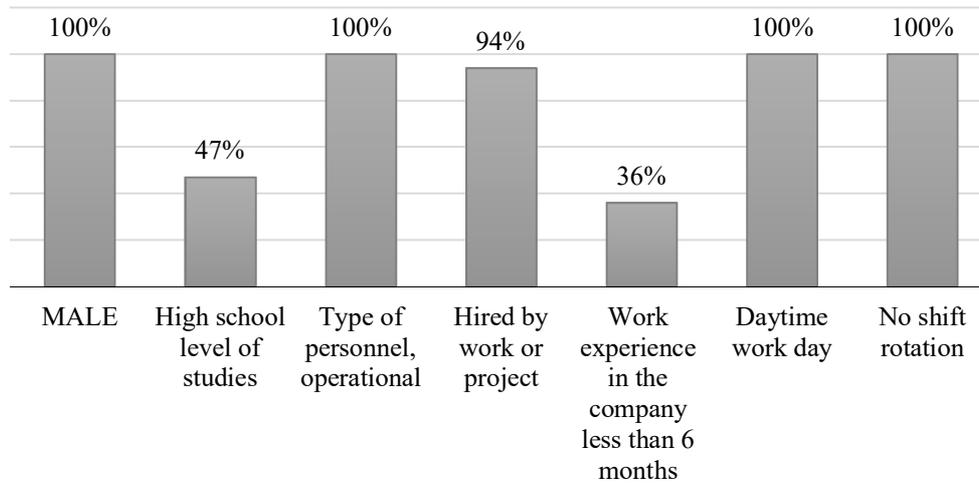


Figure 2. Sociodemographic profile

Source: Own study based on research

Table 1 shows how the Reference Guide II is composed, which consists of 4 categories, 7 domains, 17 dimensions and 46 items. This determines the questions that are applied to the workers and then the results are derived to determine the risk levels of the workers.

Table 1. Rating by answer choice

Category	Domain	Dimension	Item
Work environment	Work Environment Conditions	Dangerous and Unsafe Conditions	2
		Poor and unsanitary conditions	1
		Hazardous Jobs	3
Factors specific to the activity	Workload	Quantitative Loads	4, 9
		Accelerated work pace	5, 6
		Mental load	7, 8
		Psychological and emotional burdens	41, 42, 43
		Highly responsible loads	10, 11
		Contradictory or inconsistent burdens	12, 13
	Lack of control over work	Lack of control and autonomy over work	20, 21, 22
		Limited or no possibility of development	18, 19
		Limited or non-existent training	26, 27
Organization of working time	Working hours	Long working hours	14, 15
	Work-family relationship interference	Influence of work outside the workplace	16
		Influence of Family Responsibilities	17
Leadership and relationships at work	Leadership	Poor feature clarity	23, 24, 25
		Characteristics of leadership	28, 29
	Relationships at work	Social relationships at work	30, 31, 32
		Poor relationship with the collaborators he supervises	44, 45, 46
	Violence	Workplace violence	33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40

Source: Own elaboration based on data from (STPS, 2018)

The responses to the items in the reference guide for identifying risk factors applied to workers, were rated according to the scores shown in Table 2, with values ranging from always, almost always, sometimes, almost never, and never, and whose assignment values in the survey responses are random.

Table 2. Rating by answer choice

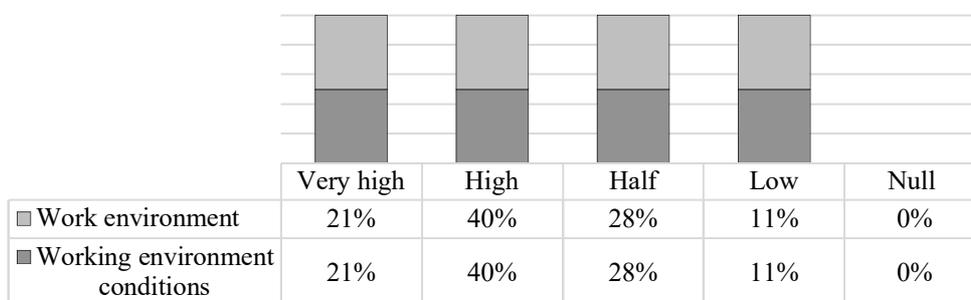
Items	Classification of response options				
	Always	Almost always	Sometimes	Hardly ever	Never
18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33	0	1	2	3	4
1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46	4	3	2	1	0

Source: Own elaboration based on data from (STPS, 2018)

Figures 3, 4, 5 and 6 show the levels of risk exposure, presented according to the categories determined above. The bars are organized into five categories: “Very high”, “High”, “Half”, “Low”, and “Null”.

Figure 3 presents the “work environment” category and the “work environment conditions” domain, whose risk is identical to that of its category. The category includes two superimposed bars that represent the percentages corresponding to each evaluated aspect, providing a comparative view of the work environment and its conditions. Both aspects, the work environment and the work environment condition, present the following percentages in each category: very high – 21% for both aspects, high – 40% for both aspects, half – 28% for both aspects, low – 11% for both aspects and null – 0% for both aspects.

“The work environment” category includes the domains of working environment conditions as well as deficient, unhealthy and hazardous work. These conditions, when not regulated or supervised, can generate negative consequences for workers in both their physical and psycho-emotional health, which can be avoided by reducing the level of exposure to risk (ISTAS, n.d.).

**Figure 3. Category: work environment**

Source: Own study based on research

Figure 4 presents “the factors specific to the activity” category and its corresponding domains of “workload” and “lack of control over work”. In the Activity – Specific Factors category, the highest percentage was present at a half-risk exposure level, at 45%. According to the literature, when job demands exceed workers' capabilities, their stress levels increase, generating adverse conditions and increasing the likelihood of workplace accidents (OSHA, 2022).

This is consistent with work overload which occurred in 26% of these workers at a very high-risk exposure level. This places significant mental and psychological pressure on workers, according to NOM-035-STPS-2018.

For the domain of lack of control over work, 25% of the workers were found to be at a high level of risk exposure. According to the literature, this leads to the perception of limitations in autonomy and control over assigned activities in the affected workers, affecting the possibility of professional development (OSHA, 2022).

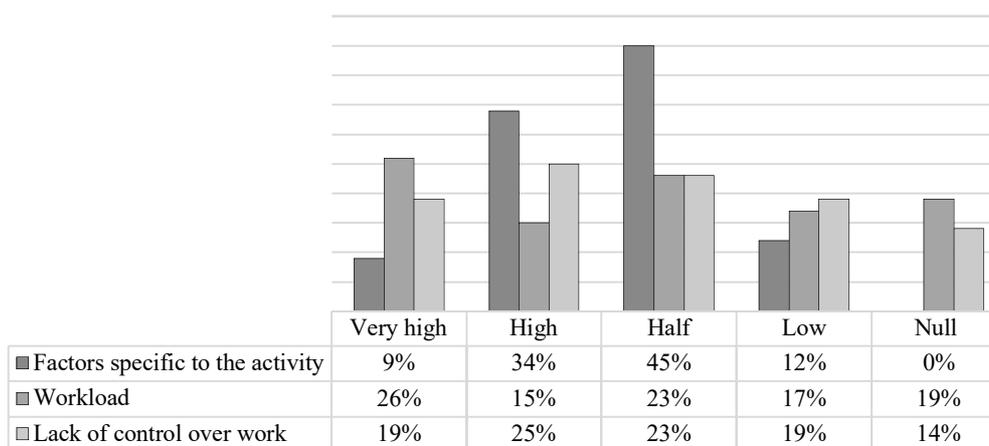


Figure 4. Category: factors specific to the activity

Source: Own study based on research

Figure 5 shows “the organization of work time” category where 32% of workers reached a half level of risk exposure; this category connects with “the workday” and “work-family relationship interference” domains. Figure 5 provides a comparative view of three essential factors in the work environment and their distribution across five intensity levels: “Very High”, “High”, “Half”, “Low”, and “None”. The percentages corresponding to the highest intensity levels are shown below (Very High): work time organization: 9%, workday: 17%, work-family relationship interference: 11%.

The impacts associated with this category and its high levels include job dissatisfaction and conflicts in work-family relationships when there is no balance in work schedules. This is when long hours interfere with family activities and responsibilities (Ramírez Esparza et al., 2023; Chan et al., 2020).

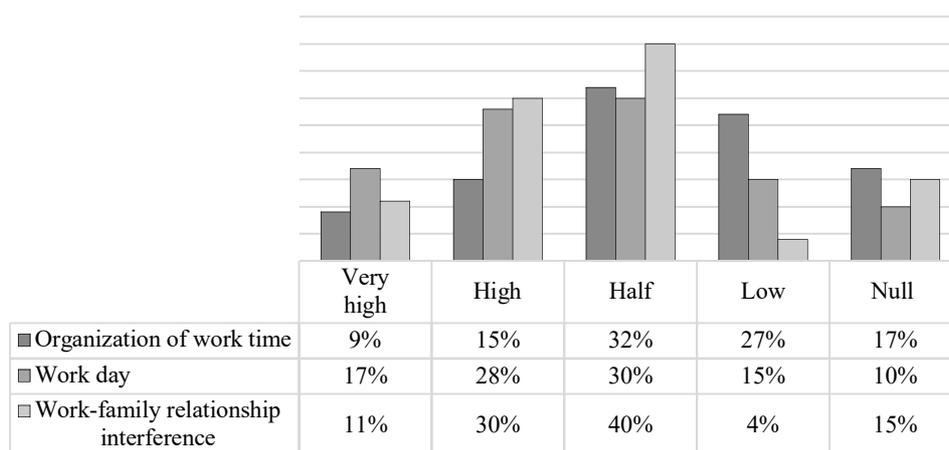


Figure 5. Category: organization of working time

Source: Own study based on research

Figure 6 shows “the leadership” and “workplace relations” category where 34% of workers were exposed to a half level of risk. This category is related to the domains of leadership, social relations at work, and violence. The highest level of each domain and its distribution are shown below: leadership: 29% – level half, relationships at work – 58%, level null and violence: 53% – level null.

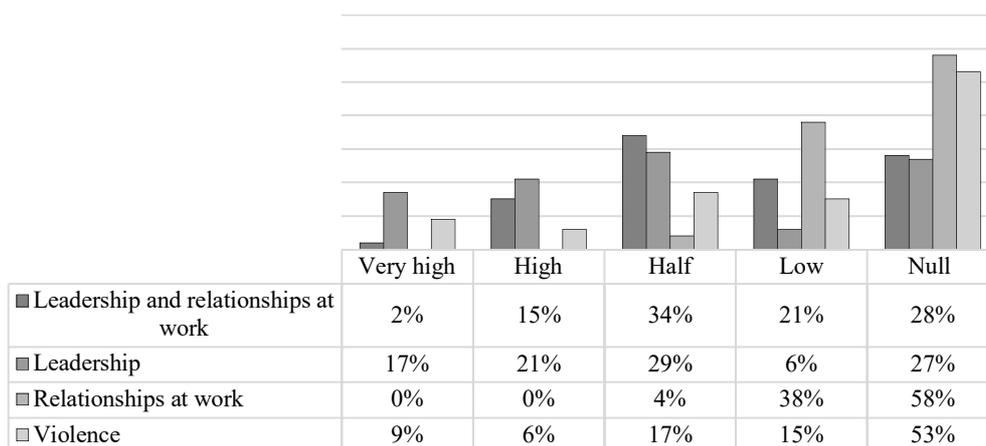


Figure 6. Category: leadership and relationships at work

Source: Own study based on research

It is striking that the levels of risk exposure in the previous category and domains are zero or very low, with workers not having considered any problems in this regard. However, poor leadership quality in workers by their superiors determines the quality of leadership exercised by them. This can be perceived by them as the lack of support or inadequate treatment, triggering difficult social relationships with peers and superiors (Orozco & García, 2010) (Figure 6).

Poor leadership and unclear roles are risk factors that workers face in their daily work. Workers' perceptions of PSRF do not expose them to such risks since workplace violence does not affect their interactions, autonomy, confidence in their abilities and job satisfaction, influencing their permanence in the job (Adegboyega et al., 2021).

Conclusions

The results indicate that the workers studied are exposed to Psychosocial Risk Factors (PSRFs) at a half-risk level due to the conditions of the work environment, the activities they perform and the physical effort involved in their work, which has generated concern among workers about work accidents (CMIC, 2023).

The anxiety generated by the fear of suffering an accident at work due to the lack of prevention measures has determined the high levels of exposure to risk in the PSRFs in the construction workers surveyed. This issue is particularly prevalent among those working in developing countries, where they must face challenges influenced by the changing nature of work. These challenges include the lack of safe environments, low control over the activities they carry out and the satisfaction that this implies. Additionally, low wages further contribute to increased stress levels, leading to negative consequences for both workers and companies by exposing them to negative PSRFs (Peña Ponce et al., 2022).

The timely identification of PSRFs reduces the chances of negative impacts on construction workers (STPS, 2018) when preventive measures are developed in relation to the organization of working time, as identified in the surveyed workers. Long working hours contribute to family, personal and social problems. According to Ladrón de Guevara Landa (2021), working conditions must be dignified to ensure the stability of workers is not undermined.

Exposure to situations of negative leadership and workplace violence, which in unequal or unfair circumstances interfere with the way of working and lead to stress with physical and emotional repercussions as well as the loss of self-confidence. These factors contribute to the creation of a harmful work environment that exacerbates negative PSRFs in workers.

Although this was not detected in the workers surveyed, it does not mean that it should not be considered, since these responses can be manipulated due to pressure or fear.

The importance of evaluating the implementation of NOM-035-STPS-2018 to reduce PSRFs in the work environment and improving the well-being of workers in small companies in the construction sector in Mexico lies in the need for adequate identification and analysis of these factors to implement preventive and corrective measures that address the mental and physical health of workers employed in an industry highly exposed to work accidents and that negatively affects their physical, mental and social well-being.

It is imperative to say that the execution and attention of NOM-035-STPS-2018 by companies largely obeys the obligation exercised by the authorities to manage the presence of PSRFs; however, the implementation of the NOM has limitations that must be addressed since the structures of the items of the questionnaire are designed

for people with secondary schooling. Another important limitation of NOM-035 is the suggestion that it be applied every two years when the rotation or termination of the employment relationship, specifically for construction workers, is often less than this period.

Additionally, to date, no training has been provided for delegates in the application of the instruments in organizations who are responsible for collecting information, with which preventive and corrective measures are dictated for the benefit of workers and companies.

In general terms, the results show that there are risk factors in the construction work environment, which highlights the relevance of the implementation of NOM-035-STPS-2018, despite the limitations that exist, to date, in said standard and that its ultimate goal would be to reduce those factors to generate a healthy and positive work environment, enhancing the performance and physical, social and psycho-emotional well-being of workers (INSST, 2020).

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ZNACZENIE WDROŻENIA NOM-035-STPS-2018 W MAŁEJ FIRMIE Z SEKTORA BUDOWLANEGO

Streszczenie: Pracownicy budowlani należą do branży, która jest jednym z głównych motorów napędowych gospodarek krajów. Pracownicy ci są narażeni na czynniki ryzyka psychospołecznego ze względu na wysokie niebezpieczeństwo ich działalności, z którym mierzy się Światowa Organizacja Zdrowia (WHO) i Międzynarodowa Organizacja Pracy (ILO). Dlatego celem niniejszego artykułu jest ocena trafności wdrożenia NOM-035-STPS-2018 w redukcji czynników ryzyka psychospołecznego i poprawie dobrostanu pracowników małych firm w sektorze budowlanym w Meksyku. Metodologia zastosowana do określenia celu badawczego została przeprowadzona za pomocą nieeksperymentalnego, przekrojowego badania opisowego, z próbą 47 pracowników, zlokalizowanych w mieście Meksyk, za pośrednictwem Reference Guide II. Oprócz tego zastosowano Reference Guide V, „Worker Data”, który kompiluje dane społeczno-demograficzne pracowników, za pomocą analiz opisowych i wnioskowania, z użyciem skali Likerta. Do doboru próby zastosowano próbkowanie nieprobabilistyczne, celowe lub oparte na osądzie. Główne wyniki uzyskane z odpowiedzi na przewodniki referencyjne sugerowane przez NOM-035 znajdowały się na globalnym poziomie narażenia na średnie ryzyko wynoszącym 58,77%. Narzędzie NOM-035 umożliwia identyfikację aspektów, które zachęcają do projektowania środków zapobiegawczych i naprawczych w celu optymalizacji psychoemocjonalnego dobrostanu pracowników.

Słowa kluczowe: czynniki ryzyka psychospołecznego, małe przedsiębiorstwa, meksykański przemysł budowlany, dobrostan psychoemocjonalny

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