PERCEPTION OF CONSTRUCTION MANAGERS TOWARDS SAFETY IN PALESTINE

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Abstract
Throughout the world, construction is one of the most hazardous industries due to the complex and unsafe nature of construction; the Gaza Strip in Palestine is no exception. Construction site safety records on the Gaza strip are considered poor and local contractors, sub-contractors and their workers face daily risks from hazards that need to be managed to prevent death, injury and illness. In view of this, the aim of this paper is to provide insight into the perception of Palestinian construction managers towards: 1) the local industry’s characteristics which generally affect construction safety, and 2) the factors that directly or indirectly cause site accidents. In doing so, a relative importance index was developed and used to rank the different common characteristics and factors identified by local managers. The results highlighted the most important industry characteristics that give rise to safety challenges viz.: poor accident record keeping and reporting systems; extensive use of subcontractors; and lack of safety regulations and legislation. The results also indicated that the main factors leading to site accidents are: lack of supervision and control on workers’ adherence to wear personal protective equipment, lack of regular safety meetings, and the lack of respect for the few available safety regulations.

Keywords
Palestine, construction, safety, industry characteristics, accidents, regulations.

INTRODUCTION
Construction is one of the most hazardous industries due to the nature of the complex and unsafe construction sites. As site safety records in the Gaza strip are poor, there is an urgent need to improve construction safety. Recent international safety literature suggests that the main factors affecting safety performance include safety awareness by top management, lack of training, poor safety awareness of project managers, reluctance to input resources in safety management, and reckless operations; also the government needs to play a more critical role in ensuring stricter legal enforcement and organizing safety training programs (Tam et al. 2004).

The prevention of construction accidents usually entails predicting future accidents and their nature under given circumstances. As making such predictions is based on knowledge about past accidents, clearly, research and prudent safety practices are required to prevent construction accidents. The major causes of such accidents are related to the unique nature of the industry, human behaviour, difficult work-site conditions, and poor safety management, which result in unsafe work methods and procedures (CII 1990).

Compared to other industries, accident rates in construction are high. Thus, construction and project managers need to be fully prepared to deal with accidents when they occur, undertaking proper investigations and reporting procedures afterwards. Accident statistics represent not