OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY OF OLDER CONSTRUCTION WORKERS (AGED 55 OR ABOVE): THEIR DIFFICULTIES, NEEDS, BEHAVIOUR AND SUITABILITY

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Abstract

Global aging population is one of the most significant changes in the recent decade. Increasing life expectancy and a declining birth rate creates an aging workforce. This paper aims to evaluate health and safety of older construction workers (aged 55 or above). Their difficulties, needs, behaviour and suitability are investigated. It is found that there is a severe aging problem in the construction industry. There is 1 older worker (aged 55 or above) for every 2 younger workers (aged under 55). The major injury of older workers tends to be musculoskeletal disorders instead of accidents, which are mainly due to their abundant experience. Their experience helps them to be aware of dangers and injuries, yet, it also causes them to ignore safety measures as they are over-relying on their own experience and judgment. Furthermore, findings also reflect that there is lack of special training for older workers from either companies or government. There is a demand to improve the current training arrangement, which can specifically cope with the needs and problems of older workers, and raise workers’ self-safety attitude for improving the whole safety environment.

Keywords
Occupational health and safety, older worker, training, construction, Hong Kong

INTRODUCTION

With advance medical technologies, aging population can be found in many developed countries (Cooke, 1997; Cooke et al., 2008; Gittleman et al., 2010; Gitelman et al., 2012). In 2000, approximately 10\% of the world’s population was at least 60 years old. According to the United Nations Medium Variant population projection, falling fertility and mortality rates will cause this figure to rise to over 20\% by 2050 (World Health Organization, 2003; Aksorn and Hadikusumo, 2008; Aneziris et al., 2008).

Hong Kong is the second highest country (region) in Asia on life expectancy with about 80.6 years (World Health Organization Regional Office for the Western Pacific, 2002). Anticipating that the aging pace will be accelerated in 2015, about 27\% of