



Occupational Health & Safety Authority

Press Release

Surveys and Studies Should be Scientific

29.10.03

The Occupational Health and Safety Authority would like to voice its concern about certain surveys and studies pertaining to occupational health and safety that are regularly reported in the media.

The intention behind these studies is to be commended in the light that they aim to increase awareness about and the levels of health and safety at the workplace. Yet one has to be careful and ensure that the studies carried out are of quality and scientific in nature.

When studies are carried out, particularly when these are then quoted or presented at fora, the market researchers should at least follow the basic premises of either qualitative and / or quantitative research.

These include amongst others adopting a sound methodology, suitable questionnaire design and ensuring that the respondents are in fact a representative sample of the group or profession being studied. In this way, one can gauge how credible the results are.

One should also take particular notice of the degree of transferability of the results of the research, of how much it can be generalized or transferred to other contexts or settings before reaching certain conclusions.

The researcher must also account for the ever-changing context within which research occurs and is thus responsible for describing the changes that occur in the setting and how these changes affected the way the research approached the study.

Given that each researcher can bring a unique perspective to the study being undertaken, one must also take into consideration the degree to which the results could be confirmed or corroborated by others.

One must also take into consideration the reliability and objectivity of the questions being posed, of the respondents, the researcher and the research interviewer.

A healthy discussion on matters of health and safety can only bear fruit if the conclusions reached are based on these criteria and one must be very careful of quoting studies that do not follow basic scientific methods of carrying out surveys.

In essence, an exercise that does not follow basic statistical principles cannot claim to have reached any sound conclusions and is not worth the time, effort and costs incurred.