A Commentary on Occupational Health for “Binning”, Informal Resource Recovery, in British Columbia, Canada

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Introduction

Informal recycling involves the generation of income from the collection, sorting, and selling of materials discarded as solid waste.

“Informal recycler” is an umbrella term representing people worldwide who are involved in this type of work.

There are numerous health hazards due to the interaction with solid waste.

Four categories of these hazards include: Mechanical injuries, Infections, Ergonomic and musculoskeletal damage, Chemical hazards.

Definition – Binning

A Canadian west coast colloquialism

The collection of discarded items of value from the waste stream as a means of supporting one’s livelihood.

In British Columbia, Canada, people who take part in informal recycling are known as “binnners”.

The origin of this term is attributed to Robert Sarti, a Vancouver Sun newspaper reporter.

Goal

Review the research on binnners in British Columbia (BC) to determine the current state of knowledge on their occupational health.

Review Objectives

To summarise the demographics of the binning population in British Columbia.

To characterize the occupational health hazards experienced by binnners and the relative importance of each, as determined by affected proportion.

To identify the gaps in research.

Materials and Methods

A scoping review was performed.

Papers were retrieved using Google Scholar.

Inclusion criteria were based on defined search terms.

No date restrictions were applied and theses were included.

Four papers were included that fit the inclusion criteria.

An additional report (unpublished) commissioned and provided by The Binners’ Project was also included.

Results – Occupational Health of Binnners in BC

Gender & Age

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<tr>
<th>30-39 years old</th>
<th>40-49 years old</th>
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<td>72% of binnners in Victoria</td>
<td>72% of binnners in Vancouver</td>
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Figure 1. The gender breakdown of binnners in British Columbia. On average, 20% of binnners are female and 80% are male. The majority age of male binnners is 40-49 years.

This is older than female binnners for which it is 30-39 years. The range of ages span 19-75 years.

Nationality & Ethnicity

In Victoria, binnners who reported being homeless, reported the following:

- 57% Canadian
- 35% First Nations

In Vancouver, binnners reported the following:

- 56% Caucasian
- 29% First Nations or Aboriginal
- 18% Asian (estimated)

Researchers have identified an inability, as yet, to characterize a subpopulation of binnners broadly grouped under the description of “elderly Asian women”.

Discussion

A greater proportion of Vancouver binnners experience occupational health hazards despite having similar demographics and use of protective measures compared to Victoria binnners.

This difference could suggest it is more hazardous to bin in Vancouver.

Elderly Asian women who bin were repeatedly identified as an understudied population.

This group’s experience of occupational hazards related to binning is not represented in the results.

There is an incomplete picture of occupational health for binnners.

References


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