

## Occupational Health Challenges among Hotel Housekeepers

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### ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** Hotel housekeepers face several occupational health hazards, including physical, emotional, and environmental stressors. These workers usually face various obstacles, such as physical strain, emotional stress, low income, etc. However, there has been minimal examination of these difficulties. This review aimed to investigate the occupational health challenges faced by hotel housekeepers. **Method:** A systematic review was carried out during August and September 2024, using databases such as Google Scholar, PubMed, and ScienceDirect. The search focused on research published between 2014 and 2024, including keywords such as "occupational health, health challenges, housekeepers." After selecting publications based on inclusion and exclusion criteria, seven relevant studies were chosen for analysis. The review adhered to PRISMA criteria to achieve a thorough examination of the selected literature. **Results:** In accordance to the review, housekeepers commonly face physical pain, worry, and stress as a result of their employment. Many people relied on medication to keep working, despite the difficulty of taking sick days owing to job uncertainty. Low wages, along with inadequate equipment, fueled perceptions of abuse. Housekeepers were also exposed to dangerous substances, which could pose health hazards. Discrimination and working stress were strongly associated with chronic health issues. **Conclusion:** Our present review indicates that housekeepers experienced four key hurdles, including workplace concerns, employment security, physical and mental health issues. To ensure employees' health and well-being, employers should address wage discrepancies, provide proper work equipment, limit exposure to harmful chemicals, and give mental health support.

**Keywords:** health challenges, hotel housekeepers, occupational health

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### INTRODUCTION

Hotel housekeepers, sometimes referred to as housemaids, room cleaners, or housemen, make up the single largest occupational category in the 2.4-million-person hotel business (U.S Bureau Labor Statistics, 2024). Hotel employees, in particular hotel housekeepers, are subject to workplace dangers and have disproportionately high incidence of chronic health disorders and injuries despite being vital to the industry's profitability (Adams *et al.*, 2020).

According to Sánchez-Rodríguez *et al.* (2024), numerous chemicals, biological, and ergonomic risks are present for housecleaners. Professional housecleaners labor in a fast-paced environment with uncomfortable postures, forceful movements, repeated motions, and heavy lifting. Back ache and pain in the arms, legs, neck, shoulder, hands, fingers, and feet are the most often reported symptoms. Even though, the employment place is not the same, those statements are relatable. Rosemberg *et al.* (2019) also stated that hotel housekeepers suffer from poor chronic conditions and are highly exposed to stressors both within and outside of the workplace. The study by Cardoso, Moriguchi and Sato (2024) emphasizes how vulnerable domestic

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workers—house cleaners in particular—are in terms of workload, pay, and health. Including elevated blood pressure and musculoskeletal pain in the upper and lower limbs.

Housekeepers face unique risks and working conditions that significantly impact their health. They are vital but also at risk because they are the largest occupational group in the hotel industry. The fast-paced, repetitive, and heavy lifting nature of their physically demanding work causes musculoskeletal disorders and chronic pain, particularly in the neck, limbs, and back. They are also subjected to dangerous chemicals and biological risks, which raises the possibility of long-term health problems. Despite their significance, housekeepers frequently do not receive enough assistance, health benefits, or the right tools. Therefore, assessing and resolving their occupational health issues is crucial to enhancing their well-being. Thus, the purpose of this study is to examine the occupational health issues that hotel housekeepers encounter.

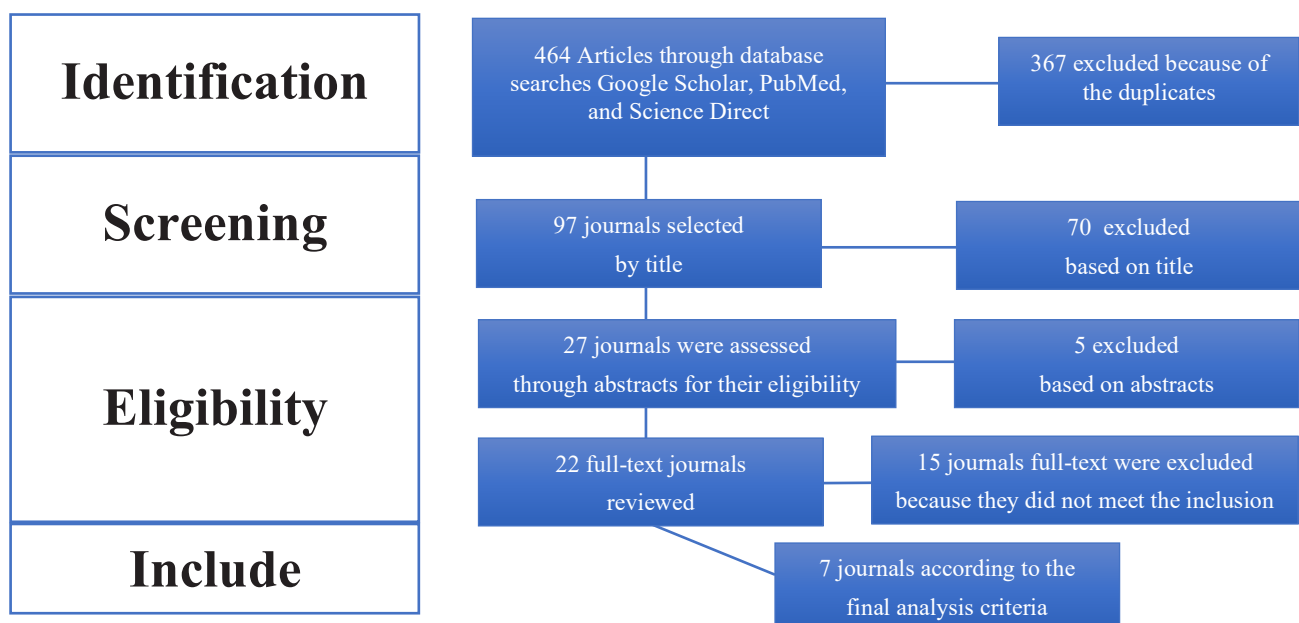
## METHODS

A literature search was conducted between August and September 2024, utilizing databases such as Google Scholar, PubMed, and ScienceDirect. Researchers used MeSH-major topic terms like "occupational health, health challenges, housekeepers" to locate relevant sources. The search was limited to journals published between

2014 and 2024 to ensure the use of up-to-date data. Inclusion criteria required that journals focus on occupational health challenges among housekeepers and be available in full text in either English or Indonesian. Exclusion criteria included studies unrelated to occupational health challenges among housekeepers, non-original works such as letters to editors, abstracts only, and editorials. Researchers independently selected the articles by using the same keywords across databases. Initially, 464 articles were identified. After reviewing the titles, 367 duplicates were removed, leaving 97 articles. An additional 70 articles were eliminated based on title screening. Out of the 27 studies considered relevant, five were excluded after abstract screening. During full-text analysis, 15 more studies were excluded for not meeting the inclusion criteria. Ultimately, seven studies were selected for this systematic review. The selection process followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines.

## RESULT

A detailed description of the name of the researcher, aim of study, research design, sample size, and results are summarized in Table 1 after the researcher selects and extracts the data for each article obtained. The total number of respondents included in this review is 1,456 housekeepers.



**Figure 1.** PRISMA Flow Diagram of Literature Review Process for Studies of Occupational Health Challenge Among Housekeepers

## Physical Health Concerns

Several studies highlighted the significant physical health risks faced by hotel housekeepers. Chela-Alvarez *et al.* (2022) found that housekeepers frequently experienced pain, particularly

musculoskeletal discomfort, which they attributed to the demanding nature of their work. Many turned to self-medication and kept working in spite of these health problems out of fear of losing their jobs. Similarly, although the risk was deemed low,

**Table 1.** Characteristics of Primary Article

Author (year)	Aim of study	Design	Sample size	Result
Chela-Alvarez <i>et al.</i> (2024)	To investigate hotel housekeepers' experiences with workplace bullying and sexual harassment in the Balearic Islands. Its second goal is to characterize and calculate the frequency of both events.	Mixed-method	1043	The majority of participants had been sexually harassed at work, but they did not consider themselves victims since they had normalized the experience. They believed it was a common occurrence and unimportant aspect of their work. Low social support and severe stress were observed by hotel housekeepers who were sexually harassed. The hotel housekeepers also experienced bullying at work, which was associated with higher stress levels, decreased social support, job and income dissatisfaction, and worse self-rated health.
Chela-Alvarez <i>et al.</i> (2022)	To understand how hotel housekeepers and related personnel perceive health risks in the workplace and the strategies used to address them	Qualitative study	34	Housekeepers had pain, anxiety, and stress. They thought their work caused these problems. They took medicine to keep working. They used public health services, but found it hard to take sick leave because they feared losing their jobs
Hsieh <i>et al.</i> (2017)	To explore the mistreatment experienced by Latina hotel housekeepers, including both policy-based and interpersonal factors	Cross-sectional	27	The housekeepers in the study had worked for 1 to 15 years, but most couldn't work full-time. They earned between \$7.25 and \$8.00 per hour. Many felt mistreated because of low pay, no sick leave or overtime, and bad equipment. They also experienced racism from their bosses and coworkers
Hsieh <i>et al.</i> , (2023)	To identify the health and safety problems faced by immigrant hotel housekeepers	Cross-sectional	140	Housekeepers in this study felt rushed to finish too much work. They didn't have enough time to rest or eat, and their employers seemed to care more about work than their health. Many housekeepers also experienced racism at work
Lin <i>et al.</i> (2021)	To assess the levels of volatile organic compounds (VOCs) that housekeepers are exposed to	Cross-sectional	23	Housekeepers were exposed to more chemicals (VOCs) than the air in the hotel. These chemicals included chloroform and formaldehyde, which can be harmful. Some chemicals could cause health problems, but the risk was low. To reduce the risk, the hotel should use less harmful chemicals or improve ventilation
Rosemberg <i>et al.</i> (2019)	To examine the connection between work and personal stress, health outcomes, and the body's response to stress (allostatic load) among hotel housekeepers	Cross-sectional	49	Many housekeepers felt stressed and had experienced difficult events. Most had at least one health problem. Stress and discrimination were linked to poor health, and high stress was linked to chronic diseases
Shapoval <i>et al.</i> (2022)	To investigate the working environment of U.S. hotel housekeepers and their experiences with health-related problems	Cross-sectional	140	Housekeepers in the study felt rushed to finish too much work. They were exposed to chemicals, germs, and physical and mental stress. Poor equipment and supplies made their jobs harder and led to injuries and health problems.

Lin *et al.* (2021) indicated that housekeepers had been exposed to potentially dangerous substances, which include VOCs (volatile organic compounds) like formaldehyde and chloroform. Furthermore, Shapoval *et al.* (2022) highlighted that housekeeper had to deal with germs, chemicals, and subpar equipment, all of which led to injury at work and other health issues.

### **Mental Health Struggles**

Numerous studies have found that long-term stress, prejudice, and mistreatment at work cause serious mental health issues for housekeepers. Many housekeepers reported high levels of stress and poor general health, according to Rosemberg *et al.* (2019), who also found a direct correlation between stress and discrimination and chronic health conditions. According to Chela-Alvarez *et al.* (2024), sexual harassment and bullying were linked to lower social support and more psychological distress. Furthermore, Hsieh *et al.* (2023) found that racial discrimination, excessive workloads, and lack of sleep frequently caused housekeepers to feel emotionally exhausted.

### **Workplace Environment Problems**

Widespread problems with treatment and working conditions were also identified by the studies. Numerous instances of mistreatment were reported by Hsieh *et al.* (2017, 2023), including racism from coworkers and supervisors, subpar work equipment, and excessive workloads. Because their employers valued efficiency over worker well-being, housekeepers complained of feeling pressured to finish too many tasks with little time for relaxation. According to Chela-Alvarez *et al.* (2024), many housekeepers normalize experiences of sexual harassment and bullying at work out of fear of reprisals.

### **Job Security Issues**

Many housekeepers experienced low pay and unstable work conditions, which led to job insecurity. According to Hsieh *et al.* (2017), the majority of housekeepers in their study made between \$7.25 and \$8.00 per hour, and many of them were unable to find full-time jobs. According to Chela-Alvarez *et al.* (2022), housekeepers frequently put off taking sick leave even when they needed it out of concern for losing their jobs. Furthermore, Shapoval *et al.* (2022) emphasized the unstable nature of work in the

sector, with housekeepers constantly under pressure to fulfill demanding standards without adequate job protections.

### **Efforts by Workers to Address Occupational Health Issues in the Hospitality Industry**

Chela-Alvarez *et al.* (2022) looked at the occupational health problems that hotel housekeepers face and found that employees are making particular efforts to deal with these problems. Employees mostly suffered from musculoskeletal conditions, stress, and anxiety, which were frequently brought on by the physically taxing and recurrent nature of their jobs. They used a variety of self-initiated coping mechanisms, such as taking sedatives and painkillers, depending on public health services, wearing personal protective equipment (PPE), occasionally, attempting ergonomic changes, exercising, and making calculated decisions about sick leave. However, structural limitations, a fast-paced work environment, and job insecurity frequently hindered these efforts.

On the other hand, Chela-Alvarez *et al.* (2024) make no mention of any particular initiatives taken by employees to address problems at work. In a similar vein, research by Hsieh *et al.* (2017, 2023) does not specifically mention attempts to address workplace abuse. Although Lin *et al.* (2021) concentrate on variables influencing VOC exposure and related health risks, they do not address worker interventions or mitigation techniques.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Physical Health Concerns**

This category encompasses issues such as pain resulting from repetitive physical tasks, exposure to hazardous chemicals, and inadequate workplace safety measures. As tidying up is a physically demanding job that requires repetitive motions, standing for extended periods of time, and lifting heavy objects, housekeepers frequently suffer from chronic pain and injuries.

The most common occupational health concern among housekeepers is musculoskeletal disorders. Frequent bending, lifting, and pushing heavy carts are the main causes; repetitive hand motions can cause wrist and shoulder injuries; and awkward postures and extended standing can result in chronic back pain. According to Sánchez-Rodríguez *et al.*



(2022), physically taxing jobs cause chronic pain in more than half of hotel housekeeping employees, mostly in the wrists, shoulders, and lower back. According to Lin *et al.* (2022), cleaners are more likely than employees in other industries to sustain musculoskeletal injuries, which can specifically affect the hands, knees, and spine. According to Sotrate Gonçalves and de Oliveira Sato (2020), stress, a high body mass index (BMI), and a lack of control over one's work environment all raise the risk of MSDs.

Chemical exposure and respiratory hazards rank as an additional physical health concern. Durable disinfecting agents, bleaching agents, and chemicals for cleaning are regularly handled by housekeepers, frequently without the necessary ventilation or safety equipment. Long-term interaction with harsh chemicals causes skin irritation, respiratory problems like asthma and persistent coughing, and elevated cardiovascular risks. According to Lin *et al.* (2022), hotel cleaners face a serious occupational risk of chemical exposure, which exacerbates lung diseases and allergic reactions.

Workplace safety flaws and injury risks are the final physical health issues. Falls and slips from wet surfaces, bruising and scrapes from damaged glass or cleaning equipment, and getting exposed to transmissible illnesses from taking care of contaminated materials are just a few examples of the dangerous work environments that can cause injuries. According to Sánchez-Rodríguez *et al.* (2022), housekeepers sustain avoidable injuries as a result of inadequate ergonomic interventions and safety training.

These results highlight how urgently interventions like ergonomic workplace layouts, appropriate safety gear, and frequent safety training are needed to lower occupational illnesses and injuries among housekeepers.

### **Mental Health Struggles**

Due to excessive workloads, discrimination, and job insecurity, housekeepers experience high levels of stress, anxiety, and burnout at work. Key mental health issues include sexual harassment and low psychological safety, as harassment causes mental distress and diminished emotional well-being (Jung and Yoon, 2020); financial and job insecurity, where low wages and unstable contracts create chronic financial stress, negatively affecting mental health; and workplace stress and burnout, as housekeepers frequently work under intense pressure, leading

to exhaustion (Chela-Alvarez *et al.*, 2020); and discrimination and workplace marginalization, with many housekeepers, especially immigrant workers, experiencing racism and exploitation (Nimri *et al.*, 2020).

According to Chela-Alvarez *et al.* (2024), work-life imbalance, financial stress, and chronic depression all considerably lower housekeepers' perceived health status. According to Hultén, Bjerkeli and Holmgren (2022), stress brought on by a poorly designed organizational structure and work-life conflicts causes a higher rate of sick leave among employees in the hospitality industry.

Due to high workloads, insecure employment, and discrimination at work, housekeepers face significant mental health issues. Inadequate workplace support exacerbates the prevalence of chronic stress, emotional exhaustion, and anxiety. Their well-being and productivity at work will continue to be impacted by these mental health issues in the absence of effective interventions. These results demonstrate the urgent need for workplace regulations that support mental health, equitable treatment, and support networks, including anti-discrimination laws, mental health counseling, and fair pay.

### **Workplace Environment Problems**

Unrealistic work demands, little downtime, and a dearth of benefits are all problems for housekeepers. Employers frequently put productivity ahead of worker well-being, which results in low job satisfaction when compared to other hospitality workers (Andrade, Miller and Westover, 2021); hazardous working conditions, such as inadequate safety precautions and poor ventilation (Owiti, Wandolo and Kinuthia, 2024); and weariness and exhaustion from demanding schedules (Lu and Chou, 2020).

These results highlight the need for improved workplace regulations, such as required breaks, equitable pay, and enhanced safety requirements, in order to shield housekeepers from mistreatment and hazardous working conditions.

### **Job Security Issues**

Many housekeepers suffer from low pay, job loss anxiety, and a dearth of full-time work options. These elements are linked to greater employee turnover in the hospitality industry (Singh and Singh, 2022) as well as higher levels of anxiety and lack of satisfaction with work (Baquero, 2022).

These results highlight the significance of offering fair compensation, opportunities for professional growth, and stable employment contracts. By putting such strategies into practice, employers can increase employee satisfaction, lower attrition rates, and boost overall productivity. For example, a research project by Baquero (2022) discovered that emotional turmoil and resistance to change act as mediators between job insecurity and intention to quit. This implies the fact that dealing with job insecurity can lessen psychological distress and decrease employees' intentions to leave the hospitality industry. The hotel industry's productivity and profitability are adversely impacted by high employee turnover, according to research by Assem (2023). As a result, making investments in job security and employee well-being benefits not only staff members but also the long-term viability and prosperity of hospitality companies.

### **Efforts by Management to Address Occupational Health Issues in the Hospitality Industry**

The occupational health difficulties that hotel housekeepers encounter were investigated by Chela-Alvarez *et al.* (2022), who also noted particular initiatives taken by management to resolve these problems. Some initiatives were noted, including the distribution of personal protective equipment (PPE), the adoption of ergonomic workplace practices, and the promotion of healthcare access. However, the way these interventions were implemented varied depending on the establishment. Policies pertaining to sick leave also differed, and some employees found it difficult to take time off because they were afraid of losing their jobs. Stronger ergonomics, workplace safety, and non-punitive sick leave policies are required in light of the substantial gaps that still exist in effectively addressing occupational health risks.

On the other hand, Chela-Alvarez *et al.* (2024) make no mention of any particular initiatives taken by management to address workplace problems. In a similar vein, research by Hsieh *et al.* (2017, 2023) does not specifically mention attempts to address workplace abuse. Although Lin *et al.* (2021) concentrates on the variables influencing VOC exposure and the health risks that go along with it, they don't go over any management interventions or mitigation techniques. Similarly, Rosemberg *et al.* (2019) do not describe any particular efforts to address these problems; instead, they mainly evaluate the viability of assessing pressures along

with wellness risks among hotel housekeepers. While not necessarily recording their implementation, Shapoval *et al.* (2022) understand possible leadership actions that could be used to address workplace challenges.

### **CONCLUSION**

This review concludes that hotel housekeepers face a number of serious occupational health challenges, such as respiratory problems brought on by exposure to dangerous cleaning agents, chronic pain, and musculoskeletal disorders. Their well-being is further impacted by psychological strain brought on by heavy workloads, job insecurity, and workplace discrimination. Many housekeepers have trouble taking sick leave, getting enough rest breaks, and recovering.

Hotel management should prioritize lowering the physical and mental stress of housekeepers by providing financial incentives, enforcing more flexible sick leave policies, and guaranteeing sufficient rest periods. A safer workplace can also be achieved by upgrading machinery and enhancing ergonomics. Furthermore, it's critical to actively combat discrimination and promote an inclusive workplace culture. Exposure to toxic substances can be considerably decreased by reducing the use of hazardous chemicals and improving ventilation systems.

Future research should explore alternative cleaning solutions, the impact of improved ventilation on respiratory health, and workplace policies that promote mental well-being, ultimately contributing to a healthier and more productive hospitality industry.

### **ETHICAL CLEARENCE**

The Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Medicine, Al-Azhar Islamic University, Surakarta, Mataram, issued a letter of clearance for research ethics permission on October 10, 2024, with the number 169/EC-03/FK-06/UNIZAR/X/2024.

### **CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

None.

### **AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION**

II: conceptualization, methodology, data curation, investigation, writing. ASM: data curation,

writing, investigation. IMKD: writing, reviewing and editing.

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