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## HYGIENE AND SAFETY IN THE SCHOOL

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### ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** The matter of hygiene and safety in the school facilities is one of great priority regarding the school's operation. **Purpose:** This very matter is examined in the present retrospective study. **Methodology:** A bibliographical search of retrospective and investigative studies, which were drawn from the Medline, Pubmed and Cinahl databases, as well as the Greek Iatrotek database and scientific literature related to the matter, was utilized. **Results:** Configuring a safe and healthy learning environment is a necessary precondition in order for the school to be regarded (θεωρείται) a foundational point of reference for life, education and work. School facilities are used by children and educators alike, and as such should be healthy and safe. In order for that to be the case, the contributions of the educators alone are not enough. The active involvement of the students attending the school is also necessary. There should be a clear school policy that defines the aims of the school, as well as its the sectors that are in need of improvement. **Conclusion:** The primary duty of everyone involved with the everyday operation of a school facility is the safety of everyone involved and the improvement of the hygienic conditions and the educational process-taking place in said facility.

**KEYWORDS:** school, students, educators, health, hygiene and safety

### INTRODUCTION

Hygiene and security matters in a workplace constitute a basic function of managing human personnel. They include every procedure that should be applied in order to ensure the physical and mental health and security of the human personnel, taking all the necessary safety measures and simultaneously creating a workplace that aims at the prevention of accidents and occupational illnesses.

The matter of hygiene and safety inside a school in is one of critical importance in the context of its operation. A school environment is among others a workplace for both educators and other personnel members. A workplace that is not just riddled with contagious diseases, but amplifies the risk of the transmission of said diseases, because of the little to non-existent emphasis that has been given to its configuration and its logistical infrastructure.

The Public Employee Code in the Law 3538/2007, article 44, and the Collective Labor Agreements, provide securing the health and safety of the educational human personnel in Greece. The European Organization for Safety and Health at Work (OSHA) with its «branch of education department» highlights the greatest dangers in a learning environment, such as bullying, work stress etc. It also emphasizes that «children should be taught about safety and health, just as they learn the multiplication tables first in primary school and move on to harder math exercises later on» (Katsaros, 2007).

Schools should provide safe and supportive learning environments for students and teachers alike. Health and safety management is a management model that groups operations, responsibilities, practices and procedures aimed at preventing dangers. The real and successful implementation of a safety management system in a context paves the way for the compliance with an extensive legal framework. That framework will include effective protection guarantees for the employees and constant improvement of the hygiene and safety conditions (Granerud et al, 2011).

Occasionally, studies have been made around the world, mostly referring to matters of school hygiene, professional prosperity, combatting emergencies. There have also been studies that suggest plans and guidance instructions for the creation of a safe and healthy school environment. (Lightfoot et al, 2000, Papanis, 2012).

The purpose of the present retrospective study is the investigation of the subject of hygiene and safety in a school facility, regarding the students, the teachers and everyone involved with the educational procedure in general.

The methodology that has been followed was primarily based upon the bibliographical research of retrospective and research studies. Those studies were drawn from the international Medline, Pubmed and Cinahl databases, the Greek Iatrotek database, as well as scientific literature related to the topic. The main keywords are school, students, educators, health, hygiene and safety. The main exclusion criteria used was the language, excluding English and Greek.

### **REGARDING HEALTH AND SAFETY**

Safety is defined as the protection of the workers from injuries that can be caused by work related accidents, and health is defined as the state of those workers not suffering from any form of physical or mental illness. Besides, the Work and Social Cases Ministry of Greece (2022) defines health and safety at work (or professional health and safety) as the interdisciplinary field, which is mostly interested in the protection of human, lives in a workplace. This protection is primarily achieved through the prevention of occupational hazards present within every work activity and workplace, which are the main cause of work accidents and occupational diseases. According to the Work and Social Cases Ministry through the Eurostat report (2012), the total amount of workers deaths that are caused by work accidents and occupational diseases rises to 2.34 million people annually and on a

global scale, whereas the amount of non-lethal accidents rises to 270 million. The total amount of accidents that other than physical damage, also cause absence from work is one of similar proportions (<https://ypergacias.gov.gr/ergasiakes-scheseis/ygeia-kai-asfaleia-stin-ergasia/>). The establishment of safe and healthy working conditions plays a crucial part in both improving the quality of the work, and forwarding competitiveness, in every organization (Tzortzakis & Thite, 2021). In addition, the administration's basic aim regarding health and safety in an organization is the protection of the lives and wellbeing of the workers, the improvement of their working conditions, and their urge to help in establishing stability within their workplace and reducing its dangers. (Aspridis, 2020). Its sectors should be specifically focused on the following (Tzortzakis & Thite, 2021):

- ✚ Policy. The policies organizations should be applying ought to aim at both the quality of the workplace, the quality of the work being done, and the environment's protection (Everard, Morris & Wilson, 2004).
- ✚ Organization. Organization is the appointment of the suitable person for each job, and the development of a cooperative culture (Raptis & Psaras, 2015).
- ✚ Scheduling. The term scheduling includes determining aims, enacting a strategy and developing plans (Robbins, Coulter & De Cenzo, 2017).
- ✚ Results measurement. The measures required for achieving health and safety in an organization should be evaluated according to certain standards, operating as exemplars.
- ✚ Progress review and reappraisal. Sharing knowledge and experience constitutes an important element of an effective health and safety management's success. According to the Law 3850/2010, Articles 4 and 5, the Workers Health and Safety Committee (W.H.S.C.) has the jurisdiction to study working conditions, suggest measures that aim at their improvement, monitor the compliance with said measures and contribute to their application (Aspradaki, 2022).

Regarding the administration of organizations, it too has an impact on the workers' health and safety. The ways in which all of those work parameters are managed promote the well-being of all the workers (Dessler, 2022).

Thus, the need of both the state, the executives of organizations, and the workers themselves to adapt a safe and healthy working environment is made clear (Aspradaki, 2022).

### **REGARDING HEALTH AND SAFETY INSIDE A SCHOOL FACILITY**

Configuring a safe and healthy school environment constitutes a necessary condition, in order for the school to exist as a fundamental reference point for life, learning and work.

In the case of school units, just like in the cases of public and private organizations, a safe learning context functions as a guarantee of its mission's accomplishment. According to the bibliography, safety is based on four (4) parameters (Raptis, et all, 2021):

- ✚ Regulations and rules. This parameter includes the legal context, rules and regulations that condition the health and safety conditions of a workplace.

- ✚ Physical security. This parameter is related to the protection of students and adults alike from dangers of physical injuries that are present within a school facility.
- ✚ Social and emotional safety. This parameter refers to the protection of the mental health of everyone involved in education, in cases such as bullying, the lack of emotional support, the need for acceptance of diversity, stress etc.
- ✚ Digital security. This parameter refers to the creation of a safe digital environment, mainly for children.

In a similar fashion, Everard, Morris & Wilson (2004) suggest a general context of health and safety that includes the following parameters:

- i. Notification of the safety regulations
- ii. Training of students and educators alike
- iii. Cooperation with safety representatives
- iv. Allocation of security responsibilities
- v. Locating and studying dangers
- vi. Emergency procedures

In order for health and safety management to be effective, a clear policy that would both determine the school's aims, and highlight all of its sectors that are in need of improvement, should be in place. This policy ought to be understood by each and every person it is referring to, meaning, the students and educators. It would function as the beginning of a clear action plan that would aim at the improvement of the corresponding performance indexes. The action plan could obviously be readjusted according to the needs of the students and educators. As such, it should be regularly monitored and updated whenever necessary. It is important to devote enough time to the action plan, in order for it to have the correct result (Sakkali, 2019).

It needs to be noted that in Greece the Education and Creed Ministry publishes a new newsletter at the beginning of each new school year. These newsletters include among others, guides for the health and safety of the students and educators. The specific newsletter references the legislation that defines how students are supervised, when school breaks take place, and how rectorships are shared among educators. In more detail, it mentions that one of the duties and responsibilities of the educators is the assumption of rectorship duty, during which the educators are tasked with supervising and protecting the students, and taking care of the school facility's cleanliness, alongside anything related to their health and safety (Government Gazette Sheet, 1340/16-10-2002).

Besides, certain newsletters of the Education and Creed Ministry highlight the fact that educators are responsible for, among other responsibilities, supervising the students inside the classroom, granted that all the students enter the classroom at the same time as the educators, and that the educators may only exit the classroom after all the students have exited. Furthermore, the students are not allowed in

any case to have cellphones in their possession inside the school facility (Government Gazette Sheet, 25/103373/81/22-6-2018).

Once again, the instructions of the Education and Creed Ministry obligate the school to update the «seismic hazard management within the school unit Action Memorandum Plan», as well as the «Internal School Unit Regulation (as a Public Independent Institution) and fires, extreme weather conditions, technological disasters and chemical, biological, radioactive and nuclear events management Action Memorandums». Both of these have to be updated during the first half of September (Aspradaki, 2022).

Similar instructions are given by the Education and Creed Ministry, regarding many different parts of school life, like educational visits for example, or school trips, and other school events. Instructions and circulars are published annually. However, they are also published on occasions of emergencies (Covid-19, extreme weather conditions such as storms, floods or snowfalls) and include guidelines for the protection and treatment of the health and safety of everyone involved with the learning procedure (<https://grafis.sch.gr/index.php/s/edL86R6r4yp9TCA>).

### **SCHOOL UNIT AND SAFETY**

Securing the health and safety of the students and the educators constitutes a fundamental part of school management. In addition, schools should be prepping up both their students, and their educators, to be aware of their dangers, and obviously, not be placing any of them in any actual danger. Furthermore, schools have full legal responsibility regarding health and safety, apart from also being an active part of our society (Sakkali, 2019).

School working environments ought to be characterized by clean and hygienic workplaces that in turn provide sufficient lighting and ventilation, and the appropriate temperature and humidity levels within them (Aspradaki, 2022).

Office equipment should be stored in a secure and steady way, which would diminish any risk of said equipment falling over. Storing shelves and bookcases should also be both secured to the wall, and capable of withstanding the weight placed on top of them. Obviously, cables not covered in plastic cannot be left exposed under any circumstances, neither in the classrooms, nor in the educators' offices. In addition, stored materials that could potentially put anyone involved with the school unit under risk of tripping, or falling on top of them, should never block the space that includes hallways, entrances and exits. Finally, there ought to be a sufficient number of clearly pointed out emergency exits that would be free to use without hindering any immediate escape. On top of that, emergency exits should be able to be opened without the usage of a key, but instead by applying pressure on them from the inside (Dessler, 2022).

The following ought to be taken into account as well (Tzortzakis, 2021):

- Sufficient lighting is always necessary within any school since it helps preventing accidents.
- The arrangement of spaces should be done in such a way that can facilitate the students' navigation around the school facility, both inside and outside the classroom.
- The equipment used, ought to not be placing anyone in any danger, especially the students. The working tables, surfaces and seats should be suitable and not pose risks of scratches, bruises or eyesight damage. The working seats especially should be steady, comfortable, and able to be adjusted to the height of their users.

School facilities, which are used by children and educators alike, ought to be safe and healthy. The contributions of the educators alone however, are not enough to make that vision a reality, as the active involvement of the students attending the school is just as vital. Obviously, in order for the students to actively partake in the health and safety aspects of their school environment there should be proper motivation, so that they can achieve (Papadopoulos, 2015):

- Improving their health and safety within the school facility.
- Improving the learning environment, which will have a positive impact on the learning procedure, and the students' lives in general.

Finally, the social, emotional and digital security of the school facility should also be brought to attention. The term social and emotional security refers to the protection of the mental health of everyone involved with the educational procedure (workers, educators and students), while the term digital security refers to the creation of a safe digital environment. (Aspradaki, 2022).

## CONCLUSION

In the end, securing the health and safety of everyone involved with operating a school unit is a matter of great importance. It constitutes both the cornerstone of the school's mission, and the foundation of the wellbeing of everyone involved, especially the students. The basic duty of not only the school management, but also every person that works there or attends it, is securing and improving healthy work conditions.

Health and safety depend on developing a positive mindset for both the students and educators. As such, it is necessary to both prep up and prompt not only the students, but also the educators themselves, to contribute and actively participate in the functions of the school they attend and work in respectively.

Only then will the school be truly successful in its mission, which includes configuring and educating future citizens, but does not amount to it. Safeguarding the physical and mental health of the students, as well as the educational and assisting school personnel in its entirety, constitutes the other, equally important half of the school's mission.

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