

Challenges and Opportunities for Occupational Health Research in Africa

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The Complexity of Definition

OH Research means different things to different people

- ▶ OH research is the scientific study of the interaction between work and health.
- ▶ It is multidisciplinary and covers a range of study areas including: occupational disease epidemiology, exposure assessment, toxicology and hygiene, sickness absence management, workplace and worker wellbeing/ health promotion, evaluation of OH interventions and health economics

Enormity of the Concerns

According to ILO, worldwide costs of work-related health issues are an estimated 4% of global GDP. This is equivalent to the entire GDP of the UK. This figure refers to work injuries and illnesses only.

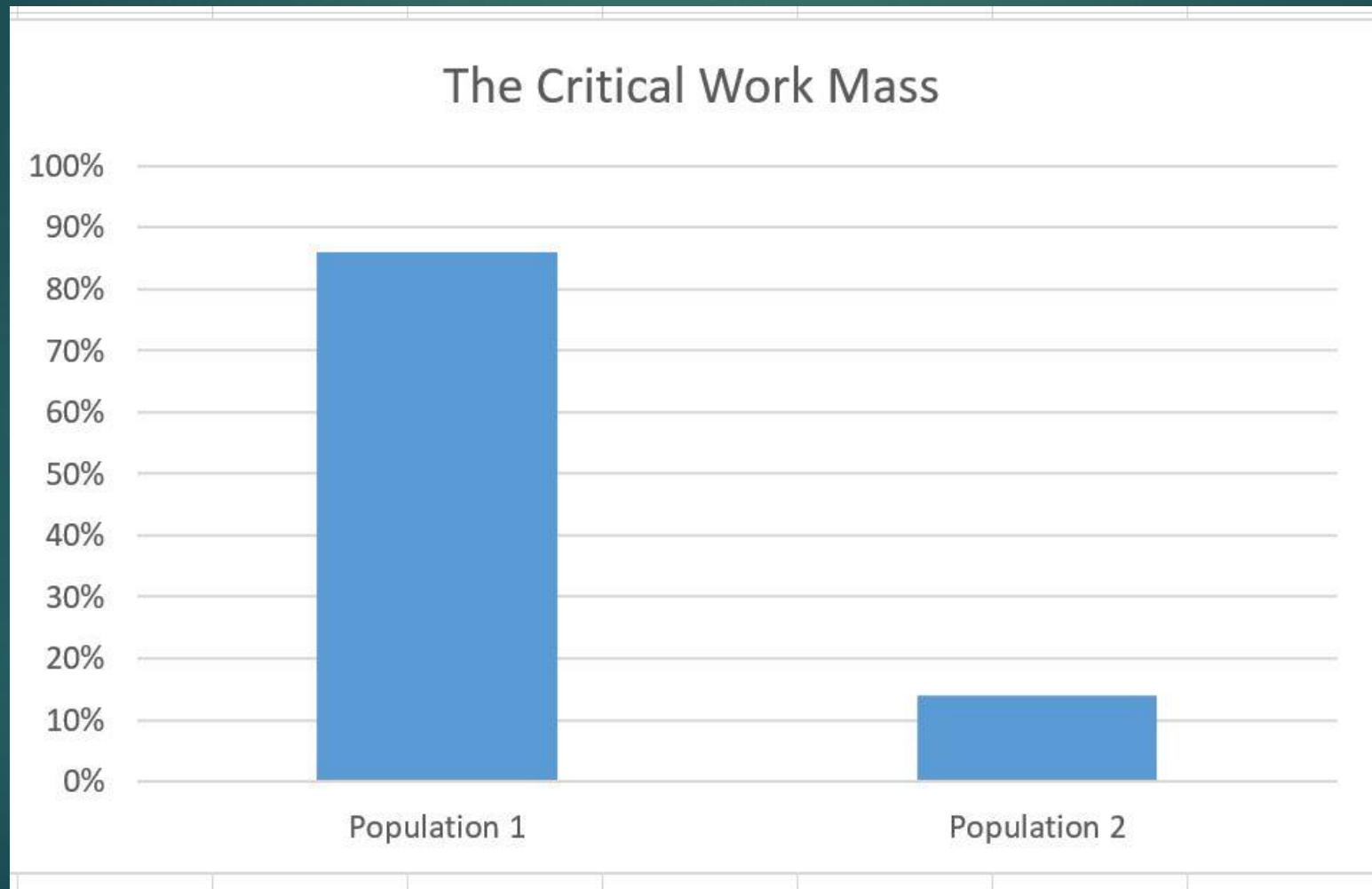
It is estimated that every year over 1.1 million people worldwide die of occupational injuries and work-related diseases. In developing countries, the risks that foster ill-health are estimated to be 10 to 20 times higher than in developed countries. *According to WHO*

The Uniqueness of the African Workplace

- ▶ Informal work accounts for 86% of total employment in Africa (ILO 2018)
- ▶ Informal firms account for 90% of all businesses in Sub-Saharan Africa (IMF 2017).
- ▶ Contributing about 55% of Sub Sahara African GDP (ECOSOC 2015)
- ▶ African countries created only **37** million jobs over the last decade, out of which only **28** percent were in wage-paying formal jobs (Mckinsey 2012).



The seat of our research work



The need to first understand OH in Africa



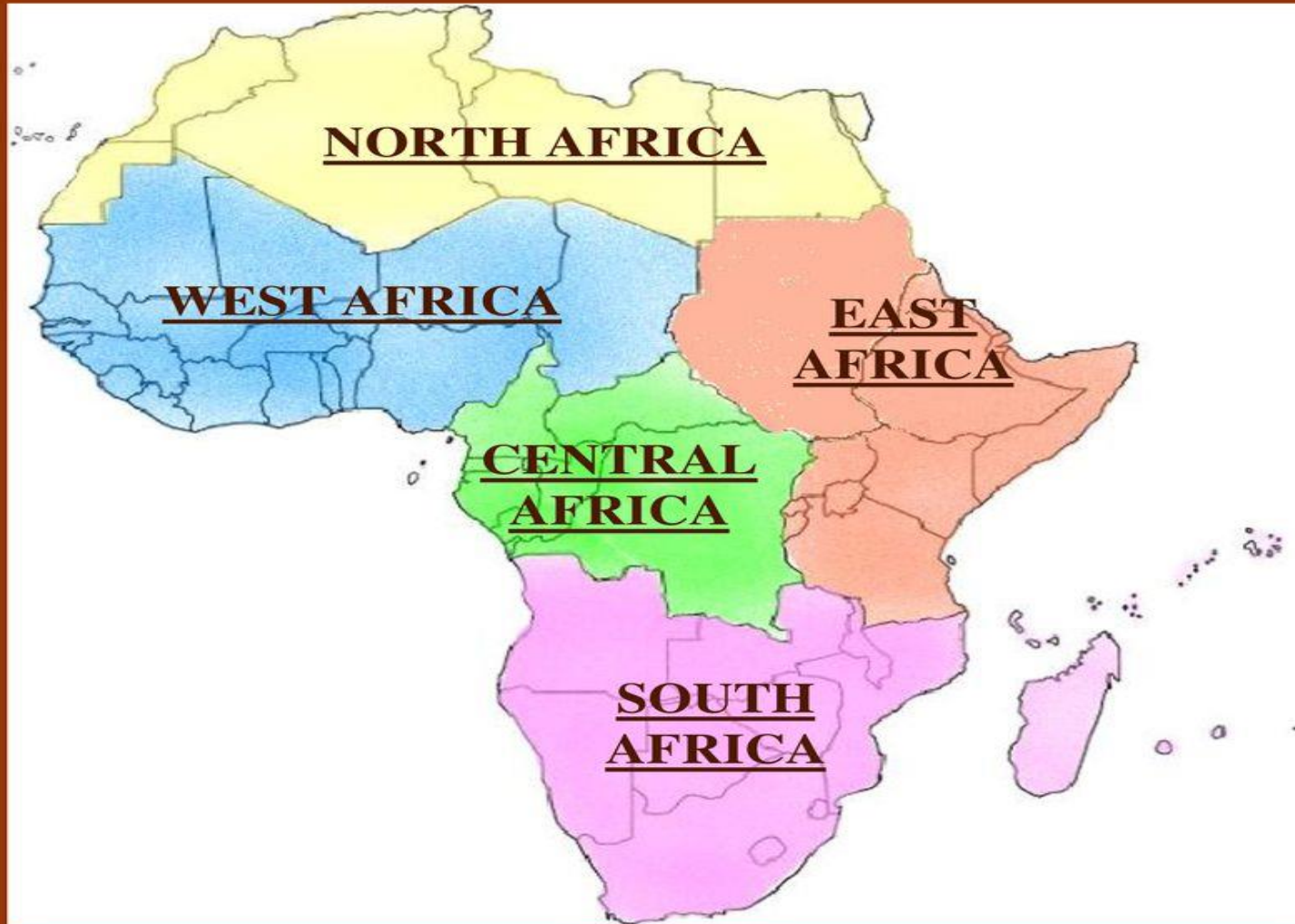
Political Buy-in and Commitment



Associated Challenges

- ▶ Insufficient number of OH experts in Africa
- ▶ Very few OH Research centres in Africa
- ▶ Poor research knowledge in the field of OH
- ▶ Available research are mostly never translated into practice
- ▶ Unavailable documentation of OH experts within the region, this makes collaboration difficult while we all work in silos
- ▶ Insufficient OH research funding in the continent.
- ▶ OH not yet seen as a specialty in many African institutions, this makes specialization difficult.

Regional OH Collaboration Centres



Fallout of these challenges

We allow outsiders to tell the African stories the way they see it

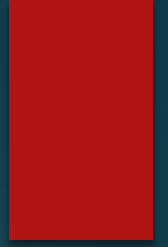


If we are not able to find out the problems, we have no story to tell to the world. This is the place of OH Research



BENEFITS

Where does this lead us all



- ▶ Research will help us understand regional OH issues in Africa and finding solutions
- ▶ Improvement in work, work processes, working conditions and workers' health outcomes
- ▶ OH research will make us own our stories and tell it to the world in the right context, using the right data in a most appropriate manner
- ▶ OH Research will open up new areas of expertise. This will create new studies, new sets of employments and improved workplace health outcomes.
- ▶ OH Research will bring forth breakthroughs in our ability to manage contextual issues in African workplace health.
- ▶ This trend will help develop interests for new entrants into the field of OH and opportunity to get trained.

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- ▶ By this, we are able to build more OH institutions of training
- ▶ Focus will not only be on the formal workforce, we will also be able to address the issues surrounding informal work structures.
- ▶ OH Research in Africa will further improve our publication standards and increase in the number of research and peer review journals we have in Africa

Opportunity to share information



Recommendations

- ▶ The need to establish sub-regional OSH Collaboration Centres
- ▶ Profiling of all Regional Experts in OH Research
- ▶ Annual budgetary provisions for OH Research by African leaders
- ▶ Inclusion of research and data management courses in undergraduate programs across African Universities.
- ▶ Continuous advocacy for the independence of the field of Occupational Health. This will birth more researches in OH.

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