

The Employment of Young Workers in Factories

Young persons entering the world of work, very often do so without any previous work experience. For the most part, they come armed with their academic qualifications. This is apart to the youthful energy which they bring to the job. Those who are employed in private enterprises and public sector organizations, are deemed to be eligible, based on the fact that they have satisfied the legal age requirement as set out in the law.

Generally, there is a minimum legal working age which applies to the employment of young workers. This may however vary from country to country. The opportunity for work experience is however provided for those underage children that the law classifies as minors. These are children who are of school age, and by law are required to be at school. Very often, children of school age benefit from job attachments. This is usually an opportunity to gain work experience which is offered during the school vacation or recess periods.

Towards ensuring the health and safety of these children who have not reached yet the age of majority, the law requires that they are shielded against activities that are dangerous, harmful to their health or that may affect their morals.

More often than not, little attention appears to be paid to the conditions of employment of young persons in the manufacturing sector, factories and in agriculture. There is a tendency to focus on job protection issue for those in working in blue- and white-collar jobs. Environmental issues are often the subject of concern and discussion for these two groups of workers. These tend to centre around air quality and unsafe buildings.

For the purpose on ensuring the safety and Health of young workers working in a factory, the Safety and Health at Work Act 2005-12 of Barbados (SHaW Act), stipulates the conditions which apply. Accordingly, 'No woman or young person shall be employed in the work at a furnace involving the reduction or treatment of zinc or lead ores, the manipulation, treatment or reduction of ashes containing lead, the desilvering of lead or the melting of scrap lead or zinc, the manufacture or solder of

alloys containing more than 10 percent lead, the manufacture of any oxide, carbonate, sulphate, chromate, acetate, nitrate, or silicate of lead, the cleaning of rooms where there is lead or zinc, the manufacturing of paint containing lead or the dry rubbing down of surfaces treated with paint containing lead, or mixing or pasting in connection with the manufacture or repair of electric accumulators or the recovery of plates or lead components from discarded accumulators.'

As a means of further protection, the SHaW Act, stipulates that where a young person is employed in continuous employment, he shall be medically examined at intervals of not more than once a year or at such shorter intervals as the factory doctor carrying out the medical examination specifies.

The Act goes further to outline the procedure to be followed where employment of a young person is injurious to health. It provides that where an inspector is of the opinion that the employment of a young person in a factory or in a particular process or kind of work in a factory is injurious to his health or the health of other persons, he shall immediately report the matter to the Chief Labour Officer who may by notice in writing, served on the occupier of the factory, require that employment of the young person in that factory or, as the case may be, in that process or kind of work, be discontinued within a specified time after service of the notice.

The protection for young workers in a factory is especially important, for they like their senior colleagues are exposed to imminent danger and serious physical harm. Imminent danger applies where conditions or practices in a workplace present a danger which could reasonably be expected to cause death or immediate serious physical harm. Serious physical harm is referred to as severe damage, whether or not reversible, to a part of the body to the extent that incapacity could be the result.

It is to be understood that working in a factory will expose young persons to hazardous work. They should not be allowed to undertake such work, which may include the operation of dangerous machinery or equipment that include for cutting, sewing, knitting, weaving machines, boilers, lifts or engaging in heavy lifting. As already recommended, they are to be prohibited for coming into contact with harmful chemical. They must not be exposed to electricity, high levels of dust or noise, extreme temperatures or heights.

If protection in all forms is to be offered by the employer, then the employer has the responsibility to ensure that clear instructions are given and followed, that guidance on how to do the job is closely monitored and that there is constant supervision of the employees so as to observe their compliance and practices.