

# Safety First: How protocols, training, and leadership commitment drive performance

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## Abstract

In the Malaysian context, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are integral to national economic development; however, they encounter notable challenges in managing occupational safety and health (OSH) relative to larger organizations. This study investigates the influence of safety protocols, training initiatives, and leadership commitment on safety performance within SMEs. Data were collected from 272 SME entrepreneurs using survey instruments adapted from previous studies, and analysed using SPSS. The results indicate that all three factors exert a significant positive impact on safety performance. These findings highlight the need for stronger regulations and active entrepreneurial involvement in implementing effective OSH practices.

**Keywords:** SME; Safety; Performance; Entrepreneur

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## 1.0 Introduction

According to the Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM, 2021), there were 1,173,604 registered small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Malaysia, underscoring their significant role in the country's economic development. SMEs contribute to employment, innovation, and the overall economic structure, making their growth and sustainability critical to the nation's progress. Recognizing the importance of fostering safe and healthy working environments within this vital sector, the Malaysian government has established the Occupational Safety and Health Master Plan 2021–2025 (OSHMP2025). This comprehensive plan consists of seven strategic thrusts and 51 programs aimed at improving occupational safety and health (OSH) measures across key sectors, including SMEs, high-tech industries, research and development (R&D), and emerging fields.

One of the main focuses of the plan is Strategy 5, which is dedicated to improving OSH compliance among SMEs. This strategy acknowledges the unique challenges faced by SMEs, including limited resources, the absence of formal safety structures, and lower levels of regulatory oversight compared to larger companies. These vulnerabilities place SMEs at a higher risk for workplace accidents and health-related issues. The OSHMP2025 aims to address these challenges by providing tailored support and resources to SMEs, helping them enhance their safety practices and comply with safety regulations. By doing so, the plan seeks to strengthen the safety culture within SMEs and ensure a safer working environment.

Given the dominant presence of SMEs in the Malaysian economy, the focus on OSH within this sector has become increasingly important. Although investing in workplace safety and health may initially seem financially burdensome for SMEs, the long-term benefits often outweigh the costs. As highlighted by Rimington (1993), neglecting safety measures can lead to more severe financial consequences, including accidents, legal liabilities, workforce absenteeism, and productivity losses. Conversely, the implementation of effective OSH practices can reduce workplace incidents, minimize damage to equipment and infrastructure, and lower healthcare and compensation expenses. These improvements contribute to more efficient resource allocation and streamlined operations, ultimately enhancing overall business performance, competitiveness, and sustainability (Smallman and John, 2001). Moreover, this accentuates the necessity for SMEs to adopt proactive safety management approaches as a strategic component of organizational growth and resilience.

The management of OSH within SMEs continues to represent a significant challenge. Recent empirical studies have revealed that OSH practices are often inadequately implemented in Malaysian SMEs, thereby exposing employees to elevated risks of workplace accidents and occupational health issues (Mat et al., 2021). This deficiency is largely attributable to several structural and operational limitations commonly found within SMEs, including restricted financial capacity, limited access to OSH-related knowledge and training, and a general lack of commitment from business owners and managerial personnel to prioritize safety in the workplace. The consequences of ineffective OSH management in SMEs are far-reaching. Beyond compromising the safety and health of

workers, such deficiencies adversely affect the productivity, operational continuity, and competitive standing of these enterprises. In the absence of robust OSH strategies, SMEs are likely to face increased expenditures stemming from workplace injuries, healthcare costs, compensation claims, and potential legal repercussions. Furthermore, the occurrence of occupational accidents or illnesses can disrupt daily operations, damage organizational reputation, and erode employee morale. Collectively, these impacts threaten the long-term viability and sustainability of SMEs, reinforcing the urgent need for targeted interventions and greater enforcement of OSH standards in this sector.

This study aims to examine the influence of safety protocols, leadership commitment, and safety training on safety performance within the context of SMEs. In addition to evaluating these individual factors, the research seeks to integrate them into a cohesive framework, with the goal of offering practical insights and guidance to current and aspiring SME entrepreneurs striving to achieve high standards of OSH. By investigating the complex interrelationships among compliance with safety protocols, the level of entrepreneurs' leadership commitment, and the implementation of safety training, this study aspires to contribute meaningfully to the growing body of knowledge in OSH management within the SME sector. The development of a comprehensive model of SME safety performance is expected to yield valuable practical implications, supporting evidence-based decision-making and strategic interventions aimed at cultivating a strong safety culture and minimizing workplace hazards in SMEs. Accordingly, the research objectives are threefold: (1) to assess the impact of safety protocols on safety performance among SMEs, (2) to evaluate the influence of entrepreneurial commitment on safety performance, and (3) to investigate the effect of safety training on safety performance.

The structure of this paper is organized as follows. The introduction outlines the research problem and objectives. This is followed by a review of relevant literature, where each construct is discussed in detail. The methodology section then explains the research design, data collection procedures, and analytical techniques employed. Subsequently, the findings are presented, accompanied by an analysis of their practical and theoretical implications. The final sections provide a comprehensive discussion of the results, highlight the study's contributions to existing literature, and conclude with a summary of key outcomes and recommendations for future research.

### *1.1 Research problem*

In Malaysia, the responsibility for overseeing SMEs lies with SME Corp Malaysia, an agency committed to promoting the advancement of micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs). SMEs are generally divided into two main sectors: manufacturing and services/other industries. These businesses collectively provide employment to around 7.3 million people, making them a vital part of the national economy. Due to their large workforce, it is crucial to establish a strong safety culture to safeguard employees' health and well-being. However, safety remains a major challenge for SMEs, as they account for 80% of all workplace accidents in the country (Rahlin et al., 2016).

Despite ongoing efforts to improve workplace safety standards, OSH issues remain prevalent in Malaysian SMEs. Recent data reveals a significant gap in the effective implementation of OSH practices, as these businesses continue to grapple with limited resources, inadequate knowledge of OSH regulations, and insufficient commitment from owners and managers to prioritize safety (Mat et al., 2021). Consequently, Malaysian SMEs experience higher rates of workplace accidents, injuries, and occupational illnesses primarily due to insufficient OSH management systems. Unlike larger corporations that often have more comprehensive safety frameworks in place, SMEs tend to lack the resources, expertise, or formal procedures necessary to manage occupational risks effectively. This disparity underscores a pronounced "size effect," where smaller enterprises are disproportionately affected by workplace hazards (OSHA, 2016). The limited implementation of safety measures in SMEs increases employee vulnerability and poses significant operational and financial risks, making it essential for these businesses to strengthen their OSH practices and compliance.

The global statistics regarding occupational safety are concerning: around 2.78 million workers die each year due to occupational accidents and diseases, while 374 million workers experience non-fatal injuries annually. This translates to over a million workplace injuries every single day (Hämäläinen et al., 2017). The impact is especially severe within small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), where fatal accidents occur at rates up to eight times higher than in larger organizations. Furthermore, SMEs experience non-fatal injuries 50% more frequently compared to larger businesses (Tremblay & Badri, 2018). These alarming figures underscore the vulnerability of SMEs to workplace risks, where limited resources and inadequate safety measures often contribute to higher accident rates. Such occupational hazards represent not just a threat to workers' health but also pose a significant risk to the operational stability and financial survival of these businesses. This highlights the need for SMEs to prioritize and integrate robust safety protocols into their daily operations. By adopting comprehensive safety measures, SMEs can mitigate risks, enhance employee well-being, and ensure business continuity. Incorporating safety protocols into crisis management strategies is no longer optional but a crucial step to fostering a safer, more sustainable work environment (Iqbal et al., 2021).

Despite these risks, however, a staggering 90% of SMEs justify their lack of OSH management (Caldarescu et al., 2021), highlighting a persistent gap between the vast number of SMEs and their safety performance. The close-knit relationships between workers and employers in SMEs often influence social dynamics, with employers actively involved in daily operations. This proximity creates a shared belief that formal regulatory frameworks are unnecessary, as issues are commonly addressed through informal, day-to-day interactions. While this approach offers certain advantages, it underscores the absence of structured safety protocols in most SMEs (OSHA, 2018). Moreover, the informal organizational structure typical of SMEs reflects the personality of the entrepreneur, making it challenging to introduce significant changes in OSH practices. When entrepreneurs or managers are reluctant to adopt improvements in safety protocols, altering the organization's safety culture becomes even more difficult (OSHA, 2018). This highlights the

need for further research to explore the relationship between safety protocols, leadership commitment, safety training, and overall safety performance in SMEs.

## **2.0 Literature review**

A wide range of research has consistently highlighted multiple critical factors that significantly impact safety performance across organizations and industries. For instance, organizational commitment has been recognized as a foundational element influencing safety outcomes, as noted by Arzahan et al. (2022). Similarly, Ismail (2020) pointed out that a well-structured OSH management system plays a pivotal role in maintaining safety standards. Moreover, Atikasari et al. (2022) introduced the concept of safety citizenship behavior, referring to proactive employee actions that go beyond formal job requirements to promote safety. Attitudes towards safety, as explored by Çakıt et al. (2020), also determine the extent to which workers comply with safety protocols. In addition, leading safety indicators, identified by Phinias (2023), provide predictive measures that help organizations identify potential risks before they result in incidents. Aina et al. (2024) underlined the importance of safety training in equipping employees with the necessary skills and knowledge.

Safety performance, which involves preventing workplace accidents, promoting occupational health, and ensuring compliance with safety protocols, is a fundamental concern for organizations across the globe. Recent research emphasizes that safety performance is a multifaceted construct with significant implications for employee well-being and organizational achievement. Companies that implement effective health and safety policies, offer structured safety training, and establish formal safety management systems tend to demonstrate stronger safety outcomes. Improved safety performance has also been linked to better financial results (Bautista-Bernal et al., 2024). Organizations with effective safety practices typically experience reduced incidents, increased employee morale, and higher productivity (Carnide et al., 2023).

Abdullah et al. (2022) argued that safety protocols, procedures, effective communication, and entrepreneurial commitment played a significant role in shaping organizational safety performance. Their findings highlighted that prioritizing health and safety not only cultivated a safer work environment but also contributed to enhanced client satisfaction (Onubi et al., 2022). Supporting this perspective, Ismail (2020) reported a positive relationship between various dimensions of safety management, such as regulatory compliance and managerial commitment, and improved safety performance. Thari et al. (2023) further suggested that in situations where implementing physical safety tools is constrained, particularly in SMEs, an administrative approach should be adopted to manage work-related musculoskeletal disorders. This aligns with Ahmad's (2018) emphasis on the critical role of managerial dedication and strict adherence to safety procedures in achieving high safety standards. In addition, Alam et al. (2020) stressed that management's commitment must be evident through concrete actions rather than verbal declarations alone, such as developing clear and comprehensive safety policy statements.

The implementation of OSH management systems is closely linked to levels of safety knowledge, organizational commitment to OSH, and the overall working environment (Aji et al., 2024). However, several challenges hinder effective OSH training, including limited awareness, high implementation costs, and outdated training methodologies (Saad et al., 2024). Abbas et al. (2021) identified safety protocols, performance monitoring, training, and induction programs as key factors influencing safety performance. Consistent with OSH requirements, Taha et al. (2024) affirm that safety training programs must align with established protocols. To maximize training effectiveness, organizations are encouraged to adopt innovative methods that yield measurable benefits. For instance, Shamsudin and Majid (2019) advocated for the integration of mobile virtual reality in training programs, arguing that it offered a more advanced and safer alternative to traditional classroom instruction or high-risk on-site exercises.

Furthermore, SME entrepreneurs were encouraged to maintain a continuous commitment to monitoring and improving OSH performance within their organizations. Cultivating a culture of positive safety leadership plays a crucial role in reducing workplace accidents and emphasizes the need for proactive and strategic safety management (Lun & Wahab, 2011). Leadership commitment to safety is demonstrated through managers'/owners' words and actions aimed at creating and maintaining a safe work environment. This commitment reflects the degree to which leaders prioritize safety through their communication and behaviour. Li et al. (2022) focused on the specific responsibilities carried out by managers to uphold safety standards. These include establishing clear safety objectives, balancing the relationship between safety and productivity, organizing safety meetings, and actively promoting safety-related initiatives and activities within the organization. Together, these efforts reflect a proactive approach to fostering a culture of safety through leadership engagement.

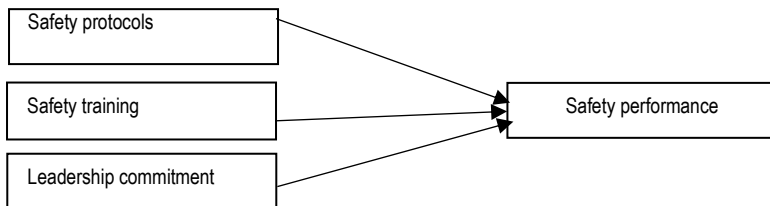


Fig. 1: Research framework

Yeboah et al. (2025) discovered that responsible leadership behaviours had a positive and significant impact on both employee well-being and safety. These behaviours not only motivated employees to follow safety standards but also contributed to the development of a strong safety culture in the workplace. This highlights the importance of effective leadership and continuous engagement with safety practices, emphasizing that both are essential for fostering a safer, more productive work environment. Strong leadership in safety management is crucial for reducing risks and promoting a culture of safety, ultimately benefiting both employees and the organization. Hence, this study seeks to examine the

relationship between safety protocols, leadership commitment, and safety training in relation to the safety performance of SMEs. In line with the preceding discussion, the proposed research framework is presented in Fig. 1.

### **3.0 Methodology**

#### **3.1 Survey instrument**

This study employed a cross-sectional survey design using a quantitative methodology, underpinned by an extensive review of existing literature on safety management. A structured 20-item questionnaire was designed to measure SME entrepreneurs' self-perceived safety performance. The instrument was adapted from the original scale developed by Vinodkumar and Bhasi (2010), which was initially tailored for the Indian context. For this research, the questionnaire was modified for online distribution and contextualized to fit the Malaysian SME landscape, thereby broadening its applicability. The questionnaire focused on four major constructs: entrepreneur commitment (8 items), safety protocols (4 items), safety training (4 items), and safety performance (8 items). Responses were captured using a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). To ensure face validity, the initial version of the instrument was reviewed by experienced faculty members in business management, resulting in revisions to improve clarity and relevance, including rewording and the removal of ambiguous items.

A pilot test involving 30 SME entrepreneurs was conducted to assess the clarity and coherence of the questions. Based on feedback, further refinements were made, particularly to negatively worded items. Reliability testing followed, and items with item-total correlation values below 0.4 were excluded to improve the tool's overall consistency and validity.

#### **3.2 Population and sample**

The study focused on SME entrepreneurs registered under the Malaysian Cooperative Commission (SKM) in Kelantan as its target population. In 2017, SKM Kelantan reported a notable economic achievement, with revenues amounting to RM1.23 million, placing Kelantan's cooperative sector among the top five in the region (Bernama, 2019). SKM is categorized as an SME under the Ministry of Entrepreneur Development and Cooperatives (MEDAC), which actively facilitates SME growth through targeted economic programs (Bernama, 2021). A total of 272 SKM-registered entrepreneurs from Kelantan were surveyed, surpassing the minimum recommended sample size of 269 based on Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) sampling guidelines. This aligns with general recommendations in the literature, which suggest that sample sizes between 30 and 500 are typically adequate for empirical studies (Bougie & Sekaran, 2019). The study achieved a response rate of 60.4%, which is considered acceptable in social science research. Literature recommends response rates between 50% and 80% to ensure data reliability (Babbie & Babbie, 1998; Dillman et al., 2000; De Vaus & de Vaus, 2013). Additionally, Mellahi and Harris (2016)

reported an average response rate of 44.7% in business and management studies, with slightly higher averages observed in niche areas such as human resource management and organizational behaviour, averaging 52.5%.

### 3.3 Collection procedure

The questionnaires were distributed through WhatsApp, a widely used mobile instant messaging platform known for its convenience and efficiency. This method proved to be highly effective in achieving several key objectives. It contributed to a strong response rate while significantly lowering distribution costs and enabling rapid data collection (Aziz et al., 2018). As one of the fastest-growing messaging applications globally (Endeley, 2018), WhatsApp offers extensive accessibility and the ability to reach broad and diverse audiences quickly (Fei et al., 2022). Its extensive usage in countries such as Malaysia, India, Indonesia, Brazil, and South Africa (Dahir, 2018; Fiesler & Hallinan, 2018) further demonstrates its potential as a reliable medium for research dissemination. Through this platform, the study successfully gathered 272 completed questionnaires, providing a sufficient and reliable dataset for conducting thorough statistical analyses. The use of WhatsApp not only ensured timely responses but also supported the study's aim of collecting accurate and representative data from SME entrepreneurs. This approach highlights the growing relevance of digital communication tools in modern research methodologies, especially in contexts where cost-efficiency, accessibility, and speed are critical for effective data collection.

## 4.0 Results

Data analysis was performed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), which included both descriptive statistics and hypothesis testing procedures. To assess the distribution of the data, skewness and kurtosis values were examined. The skewness values for all variables ranged from -0.850 to 0.009, while the kurtosis values ranged from -0.873 to 5.904. According to the guidelines set by Sharma and Ojha (2020), these values fall within the acceptable range for normal distribution, indicating that the data are approximately normally distributed. This suggests that the assumptions required for statistical tests based on normality were met, allowing for the reliable interpretation of the results.

To evaluate the internal consistency and reliability of the measurement constructs, Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated. This reliability assessment is particularly relevant given that the study examines constructs across diverse faculties and academic levels for the first time. Internal consistency denotes the extent to which items within a construct are correlated and measure the same underlying concept. The results, presented in Table 1, show Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.915 to 0.958. These values exceed the commonly accepted threshold, confirming high reliability, as recommended by Sekaran and Bougie (2013).



Table 1: Reliability Statistics

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	No of Items
Safety Performance	0.958	8
Safety Protocols	0.940	4
Leadership Commitment	0.915	8
Safety Training	0.929	4

Out of the 450 questionnaires distributed, a total of 272 were successfully returned via WhatsApp, yielding a response rate of 60.4%. This response rate aligns with the findings of Fei et al. (2022), who reported a response rate of 55% through WhatsApp, which was notably the highest among mobile messaging platforms. WhatsApp, known for its widespread use and high engagement, proved to be an efficient tool for data collection in this study. As illustrated in Table 2, the demographic composition of the sample showed that 54% of participants were female, while 46% were male.

In terms of age distribution, the largest group of respondents (29.8%) fell within the age range of 39 to 48 years, followed by 28.3% in the 29 to 38 age range. Additionally, 21% of the respondents were aged between 49 and 58, while 11% were in the 19 to 28 range, and 9.9% were between 59 and 68 years old. The educational background of the participants varied as well: 36.8% held SPM/STPM qualifications, 27.2% had completed diploma programs, 21% possessed bachelor's degrees, 5.5% held master's degrees, and 0.4% had obtained PhDs. Meanwhile, 9.2% of the respondents had other forms of qualifications. These demographic characteristics provide a diverse representation of the SME population in the region.

In Table 3, the model summary presents an R-value of 0.892 and an R<sup>2</sup>-value of 0.769, demonstrating a strong linear regression relationship between the examined variables. The R<sup>2</sup>-value, in particular, indicates that approximately 76.9% of the variation in safety performance can be explained by the independent variables included in the study. This suggests that the factors analyzed in the study play a significant role in shaping safety performance within SMEs, offering valuable insights into the key determinants of safety outcomes.

Table 2: Gender, Age and Education

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	125	46.0
Female	147	54.0
Total	272	100.0
Age	Total	Percent
19-28 years old	30	11.0
29-38 years old	77	28.3
39-48 years old	81	29.8
49-58 years old	57	21.0
59-68 years old	27	9.9

Education	Total	Percent
PhD	1	0.4
Master	15	5.5
Bachelor	57	21.0
Diploma	74	27.2
SPM/STPM	100	36.8
Others	25	9.2
Total	272	100.0

Table 3: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square
1	0.892	0.796

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to test the hypotheses of this study, with all necessary assumptions being met prior to the analysis. The study explored the relationships between safety protocols, leadership commitment, safety training, and safety performance in SMEs. The findings revealed that safety protocols had a significant and positive impact on safety performance ( $\beta = 0.550$ ,  $p \leq 0.001$ ). Likewise, leadership commitment showed a statistically significant positive relationship with safety performance ( $\beta = 0.184$ ,  $p \leq 0.001$ ), as did safety training ( $\beta = 0.199$ ,  $p \leq 0.001$ ). These results emphasize the importance of these factors in influencing safety outcomes within the SME sector. The regression coefficients for the key factors influencing safety performance are summarized in Table 4. The analysis indicates that effective safety protocols, strong leadership commitment, and comprehensive safety training are crucial components for enhancing safety performance in SMEs. These findings support the notion that proactive management and employee engagement in safety initiatives play a vital role in creating safer work environments, ultimately leading to a reduction in workplace accidents and injuries.

Table 4: Regression and Related Statistics

Model	Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.350	.020
	Safety_protocols	8.946	<.001
	Leadership_commitment	4.168	<.001
	Safety_training	3.509	<.001

## 5.0 Discussion and contributions

This study examined the key factors influencing safety performance in Malaysian SMEs, specifically focusing on the importance of safety protocols, leadership commitment from entrepreneurs, and safety training. The findings reveal that these elements play a critical

role in improving workplace safety and reducing the occurrence of occupational accidents. The results align with previous studies by Abdullah et al. (2022) and Vinodkumar and Bhasi (2010), which emphasized the significant impact of strong management commitment and well-structured safety practices on enhancing safety outcomes. Given the alarming rate of workplace accidents in SMEs, the study highlights the urgent need for a comprehensive and integrated approach to OSH. Addressing OSH challenges in SMEs requires a collaborative effort among government agencies, industry bodies, and SME stakeholders. By working together, these groups can raise safety awareness, ensure regulatory compliance, and offer tailored support, including training programs, that address the specific needs of SMEs. Additionally, such collaboration can help create a strong safety culture within organizations, motivating employees to actively participate in safety initiatives. Ultimately, fostering a safety-first mindset at all levels of an SME is essential for reducing workplace risks and improving overall safety performance. The study emphasizes that a unified approach to OSH will help SMEs achieve safer work environments, contributing to their long-term success and competitiveness in the market.

Key initiatives for improving occupational safety and health (OSH) in the SME sector include enhancing OSH awareness, encouraging strong leadership commitment, delivering focused and relevant training programs, and offering incentives to promote regulatory compliance. These measures are vital for cultivating a resilient and proactive safety culture within small and medium enterprises. This study makes two significant contributions to the existing body of knowledge. First, it addresses a critical gap by empirically examining how safety protocols, leadership commitment, and safety training collectively influence safety performance in SMEs. Second, it provides actionable insights for SME owners and managers, highlighting strategies to develop a more safety-conscious organizational culture. By actively involving employees in safety initiatives and embedding safety as a core organizational value, SMEs can improve not only worker well-being but also their overall operational performance. These findings serve as a valuable resource for both academic research and practical safety management in the SME context.

Recognizing the strategic importance of safety performance is critical for SMEs, as it directly influences business continuity and financial stability. Unlike other operational aspects that may be isolated or compartmentalized, safety needs to be integrated throughout the entire organization, from leadership to frontline workers. When safety is embedded within everyday processes and decision-making, it fosters a culture where risk awareness and prevention are prioritized. This integration ensures that safety is not merely a set of protocols but a fundamental part of the company's ethos. A proactive and comprehensive approach to safety management minimizes the risk of workplace accidents, which in turn reduces associated costs such as medical expenses, compensation, and legal liabilities. Moreover, by prioritizing safety, SMEs can build trust and morale among employees, enhancing their sense of security and satisfaction. A strong safety culture also improves operational efficiency, productivity, and helps SMEs stay competitive and resilient in a constantly evolving business landscape. Ultimately, safety performance becomes an

enabler of long-term success, ensuring that businesses are not only safer but also more adaptable and able to thrive in the face of challenges.

## **6.0 Conclusion**

Like many others, this study has certain limitations, mainly due to its reliance on self-administered questionnaires for data collection. Since participation was voluntary, some respondents may have provided answers that they believed to be socially desirable, rather than reflecting their true workplace behaviours. This could result in biases and affect the accuracy and consistency of the data, as self-reporting often leads to overestimations of positive behaviours or underreporting of negative behaviours. To mitigate this issue, future research could adopt a mixed-methods approach that integrates both qualitative and quantitative techniques. Using qualitative methods, such as interviews or focus groups, could provide richer insights into the respondents' perspectives and motivations, while quantitative analysis would ensure the statistical robustness of the findings. Combining these approaches would help to triangulate the data, improving the reliability and validity of the results, and offering a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing safety performance in SMEs.

This study examined the impact of safety protocols, leadership commitment, and safety training on the safety performance of SMEs. While acknowledging its constraints, the research contributes significantly to the ongoing development of OSH practices. The findings clearly demonstrate the importance of these three factors in shaping effective safety performance, providing valuable insights for entrepreneurs, policymakers, and researchers alike. For policymakers, the results highlight the potential benefits of implementing supportive measures such as financial aid, simplified regulatory processes, and targeted training initiatives to enhance OSH compliance among SMEs. For business owners and managers, the study offers practical strategies for developing effective safety programs tailored to their specific operational needs. Researchers, meanwhile, can use these findings as a foundation for future studies aimed at further improving OSH practices and policies within the SME sector.

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## **Article Contribution to Related Field of Study**

The key contribution of this paper lies in the empirical analysis of safety protocols, training, leadership commitment, and safety performance within SMEs. The lack of effective OSH measures can lead to substantial financial burdens for SMEs, including costs associated with workplace injuries, medical treatments, and legal issues. The findings highlight the

need for policymakers to establish clearer regulations and for entrepreneurs to adopt more robust OSH strategies to safeguard both workers and the business.

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