



British Occupational  
Hygiene Society



**IOHA**



OCCUPATIONAL  
HYGIENE SOCIETY  
OF IRELAND

# 13th IOHA International Scientific Conference

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Dublin, Ireland  
June 2024

The Occupational Hygiene Society of Ireland (OHSI) and the British Occupational Hygiene Society (BOHS) are privileged to jointly host this conference and to contribute to its successful outcome.

The conference theme has been confirmed as - 'Protecting workers from health hazards: Advancing in this changing world'.

The conference aims to promote occupational hygiene and worker health protection by the minimisation of worker exposure to hazardous agents globally through plenary sessions, keynote lectures, parallel talks, workshops, poster presentations and

professional development as well as networking opportunities and social functions.

A strong Global media campaign will publicise the main causes of occupational disease throughout the conference.

More information including venue, dates and abstract submission arrangements will be announced very soon. Please mark your diaries for June 2024 in Dublin, Ireland!

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# Promoting the contribution of women to occupational hygiene

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There is an increasing global understanding that women's contributions to all workplaces have been underestimated and undermined by prejudicial attitudes. As occupational hygienists, we are concerned that this is also the case in our profession and within our professional organisations. Considering the global need for additional capacity in occupational hygiene, minimising the numbers or influence of women in our profession can be assumed to negatively affect the health and safety of workers everywhere. This is especially true for working women who tend to be impacted in a variety of ways, including a) less emphasis on workplace exposure assessment for women, b) poor availability of proper personal protective equipment, and c) lack of focused research regarding hazards and controls specific to female workers, such as musculoskeletal, psychosocial, and reproductive research.

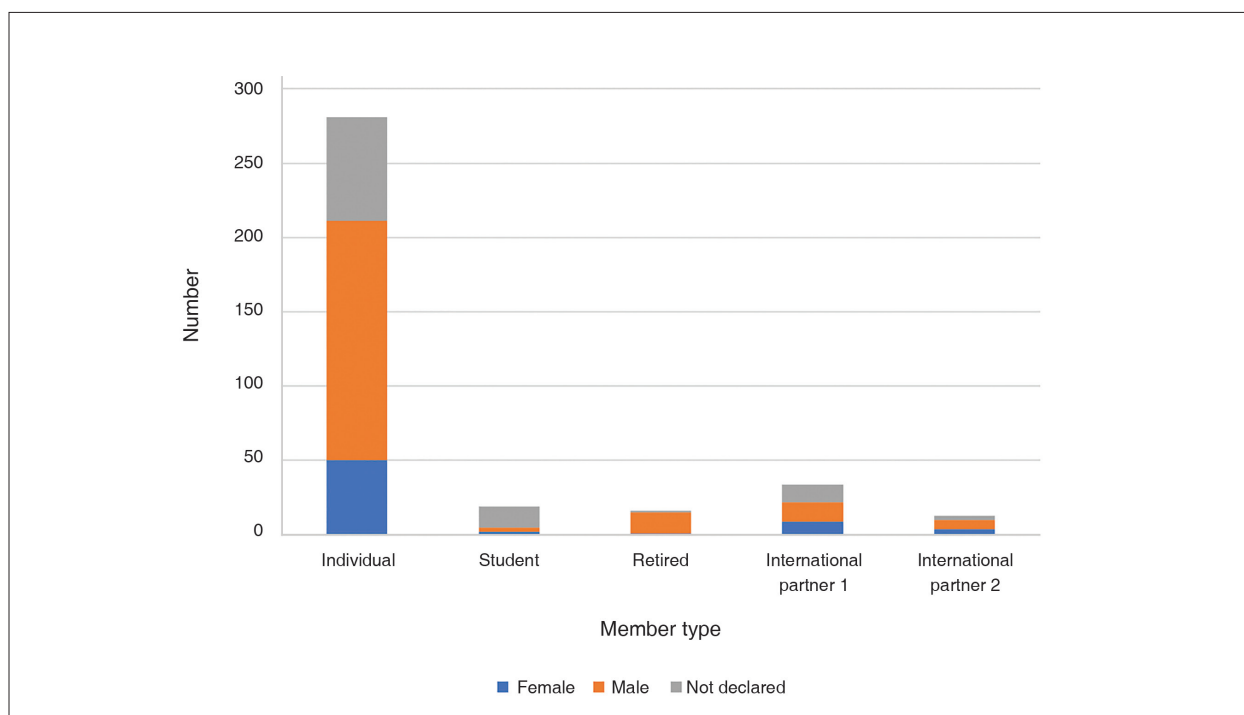
The British Occupational Hygiene Society (BOHS) recently conducted an informal and anonymous survey of members, and a series of webinars, panels and workshops, to identify and report their female gender-oriented experiences while working in the profession. The



**The Chartered  
Society for Worker  
Health Protection**

results of the survey and other activities were used by the BOHS to find ways to improve activities and practices that might influence the numbers and roles that female occupational hygienists may play in the profession in the future. The study may also be a model for other occupational hygiene organisations within the International Occupational Hygiene Association (IOHA), and it may identify areas of collaboration on this important topic.

The basic results of the online member survey are shown in Figure 1 and indicate that the current Society membership is approximately 18% female.



**Figure 1. BOHS membership by gender, 2021**

The survey included focused and open-ended questions. Some of the responses by our BOHS members were surprising, as shown by the following example:

*"As a woman, when you find yourself in a situation where you are clearly being treated as a lesser person, with a lack of respect or in a sexist way, how do you recommend that situation is dealt with? As often, being assertive leads to you being tarnished as 'difficult' or 'emotional' but keeping quiet can make things worse and act as an enabler for that person to continue to treat you in a derogatory way with a complete lack of respect."*

The responses also highlighted the importance of women to the Society and the profession, and the qualities that they bring to occupational hygiene. The survey highlighted that BOHS improvements in gender representation on the Board have had a positive impact on female members' perceptions of the organisation.

*"It's great to see so many women in the profession now, especially the younger generation too! I remember coming to conferences 20 years ago and it was all grey-haired men in suits predominantly... it really has changed... I've seen the Board go to [a] 50% split [on] gender! We have seen more female presidents in the last six years than we have in the previous 65 years!"*

As we seek to attract the brightest and the best into occupational hygiene, the BOHS has set out to identify obstacles to engaging with all potential future hygienists. If there are obstacles to the progression and retention of female hygienists, then it is worthy of focus. Women comprise a significant proportion of BOHS members, but the Society could do more to encourage women into the profession and provide pathways to increase the organisation's membership numbers.

On 2 November 2021, the BOHS held a webinar where Ms Tina Attenborough, an expert in discrimination in the workplace, and Prof. Dulini Fernando, an academic expert in the field of equality practice, joined Alison Margary to discuss opportunities for tackling common challenges faced by female occupational hygienists. The webinar was open to all BOHS members and was advertised via e-mail and the various BOHS social media channels. Approximately 70 BOHS members attended the webinar.

The webinar was followed, a week later, by the President's Session at the 2021 BOHS Conference, which brought together a panel of female hygienists and our Honorary Secretary to further explore the matter in open discussion with members of the Society. In addition,

a focused session took place at the BOHS Asbestos Conference, held virtually on 18 November 2021, which poignantly highlighted the painful experiences of some female occupational hygienists working in the field of asbestos management and control.

As well as highlighting and raising awareness of an overlooked issue, these sessions contributed to persuading the Board of the BOHS of the need to take positive action to promote the contribution of women in the profession, and to address the inequalities in treatment and opportunities that they experienced. The Society is now committing resources to an action plan to address these issues. The benchmark that we are aiming for is a female membership of 35%, which reflects the proportion of female science, technology, and engineering graduates in the UK.

The following initiatives will be included in the scope of the activities to be considered and developed:

1. A network of female occupational hygienists (potentially with other IOHA members and/or other UK safety professionals/ health professionals)
2. A leadership development programme aimed at developing leadership skills, with priority for those from less represented or disadvantaged groups, and for those whose careers have been interrupted for health or family reasons
3. More systematic analysis and development of equality, diversity and inclusion through all our volunteer activities
4. Equality impact assessment of all policies, roles and practices of the Society, ranging from role commitment to design and focus of qualifications
5. Campaigns to recruit women and other less represented groups into the profession to ensure that they see occupational hygiene as their natural home as a profession
6. Continued monitoring, scrutiny, awareness-raising and regular central inclusion in the Society's main conferences, to highlight women and occupational hygiene, until gender parity has been achieved

The steps outlined above will not address all the societal issues that cause gender discrimination in the workplace. However, we hope that, as a Society, we can contribute positively to promoting the enormous contribution that women already make to occupational hygiene.

We would very much welcome developing these approaches in partnership with IOHA and other IOHA members. We are sure that there is much we can learn from the practices of other organisations and that, through global engagement, we can achieve more.

# Pilot OHTA module on industrial hygiene in the pharmaceutical industry

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The French Society of Occupational Hygienists (SOFHYT) is proud to have been able to provide the new Occupational Hygiene Training Association (OHTA) module on the pharmaceutical industry for the first time in the world. The module was translated into French and then adapted to an online training format. The online training was conducted once a week, for four weeks, from 19 November to 10 December 2021.

The decision was made to not have too many participants in the course since it was a pilot module; thus, only seven trainees were selected. The training was offered to members of the Swiss Society of Occupational Hygiene (SSHT) and SOFHYT. The participants came from many different backgrounds and included a certified occupational hygienist not working in the pharmaceutical industry, a consultant who was more focused on the chemical industry but had some customers in the pharmaceutical industry, a technical director of an analytical laboratory, a global environmental health and safety (EHS) manager from a pharmaceutical company, a certified occupational hygienist working for a few months for a pharmaceutical group, and two experienced EHS professionals working for a pharmaceutical group. The training was provided by five certified occupational hygienists, all of whom were working for pharmaceutical companies. Frédérique Parrot, the former president of SOFHYT, oversaw the management of this pilot project.

At the end of the four-day course, the students provided feedback. One of the aspects most appreciated was the sharing of experiences and

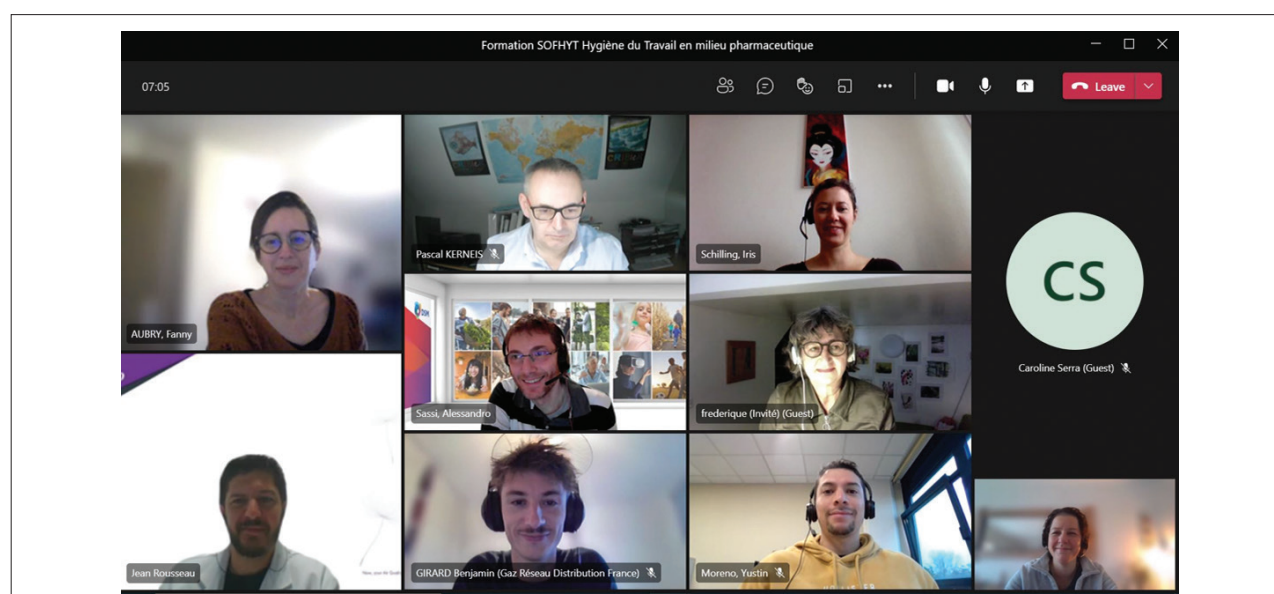
advice by the trainers throughout the course. Facilitator discussions of practical situations were considered to be "...very enriching" and "certainly one of the most interesting elements of the training". Videos and practical cases used to illustrate working conditions were also mentioned by the participants as being especially effective.

Overall, course feedback was very positive. Some of the comments were:

*"This was a very enriching training on occupational hygiene in the pharmaceutical industry. I appreciated the excellent technical knowledge and experience of the trainers in addition to the high-quality course manual and supporting training material. The four days go by so quickly that I am already looking forward to a next session".*

*"Thank you for adapting this course in French. With trainers who have good experience, I was captivated all the time and I learned a lot."*

Other OHTA trainings (or trainings using OHTA documents as a basis, but in French and with a French exam) may be conducted in the future. A Zoom photograph of the course instructors and participants is shown in Figure 2, with Nathalie Argentin at the bottom right.



**Figure 2. SOFHYT OHTA course instructors and participants with Nathalie Argentin (bottom right)** Photograph: courtesy of SOFHYT

# Occupational hygiene in Argentina

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Argentina is located at the tip of South America, and borders Chile, Bolivia, Paraguay, Brazil and Uruguay. It has a population of 45 million people with 13 million living in its main city of Buenos Aires. The national language of Argentina is 'South American' Spanish but is often supplemented with Italian, English and German words.

The Argentinian workforce includes a continuous influx of migrant workers. Many of these workers speak a variety of native languages and Spanish dialects, while a large number speak Portuguese as their native tongue. This presents a challenge to occupational health specialists when conducting training and gathering information regarding workers' activities and exposures.

Occupational hygiene began in Argentina in the 1940s and 1950s with a period of heavy industrial production as a result of post-World War II Europe's needs for goods, machinery and food. Today, Argentina has between 10 000 and 20 000 health and safety professionals, many of whom hold an equivalent of an associate degree. Others have bachelor's degrees or postgraduate degrees with various undergraduate backgrounds, including chemistry, biology, engineering, architecture and physics.

Approximately 20 institutions are registered at the federal level as tertiary educational institutions (primarily public universities or the equivalent of community colleges) that provide degrees in occupational safety and health in Argentina. There are also some private colleges that offer programmes in health and safety. Most of these institutions are in or around Buenos Aires; several others are located throughout the country. Currently, there is only one certificate diploma offered by the Mechanical and Electrical Engineering Council (COPIME) for an occupational health programme. The COPIME offers a 'diplomatura', defined by the federal education legislation as a series of courses with a minimum number of credits, generally more than 100 credit hours (120 contact hours

in this case). Occupational hygiene is included in the health and safety programmes that these institutions offer but, currently, no designated graduate or undergraduate degree in occupational hygiene is offered.

Internet links to some of the Argentinian institutions that offer degrees in occupational health and safety are provided in the following list:

1. <https://ahra.org.ar/diplomatura-en-higiene-ocupacional/>
2. <https://www.copime.org.ar/pages/detail/1110>
3. <https://exactas.uba.ar/ensenanza/carreras-de-posgrado/seguridad-e-higiene-en-el-ambito-laboral/>
4. <http://www.fadu.uba.ar/post/64-68-seguridad-e-higiene-en-la-industria-de-la-construccion>

With regard to the professional organisations that promote occupational health in Argentina, there are two non-profit institutions: the Argentine Republic Association of Hygienists (AHRA) and the Argentine Society of Occupational and Industrial Hygiene (SAHIO). These two organisations have more than 400 registered members, and both have yearly events where local professionals meet. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the meetings have taken place virtually in the past two years, but in-person events are being planned for 2022.

There are two industrial hygienists, residing in Argentina, who are certified by the Board of Global Credentialling (BGC). Although there are no official statistics regarding occupational safety and health professional salaries, informal inquiries and experiences of practising professionals indicate that the average salary for a health and safety professional in Argentina ranges from US\$ 400 to US\$1 500 per month, with higher salaries of more than US\$ 4 000 for upper-managerial positions at international corporations.

