Safeguarding public health through SOP Compliance: Business lessons from COVID-19 in Sabah

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: The COVID-19 pandemic underscored the critical role of adhering to Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) in mitigating health risks and ensuring operational continuity for business premises. This study focuses on identifying the lessons learned by business premises in five districts of Sabah—Kota Kinabalu, Ranau, Sandakan, Lahad Datu, and Tawau, specifically emphasising the importance of implementing COVID-19 preventive measures. **Materials and Methods:** The study utilised a mixed-method approach to gather data, including surveys conducted among business owners and employees, laboratory testing to evaluate the efficacy of hygiene practices such as the use of hand sanitisers and infrared thermometers, and statistical analysis to identify trends and correlations. The surveys captured insights into how businesses implemented SOPs, the challenges faced, and the overall impact on operations and employee well-being. Lab testing provided objective data on the effectiveness of preventive measures, while statistical analysis helped to quantify compliance levels and their correlation with operational outcomes. **Results:** Findings highlight that strict adherence to SOPs, such as social distancing, mask usage, temperature screenings, and hygiene practices, not only protected public health but also fostered customer confidence and business sustainability. Businesses that consistently complied with SOPs experienced fewer operational disruptions and were better prepared for the evolving challenges of the pandemic. The study further emphasises that compliance with SOPs is not only a regulatory requirement but a cornerstone of resilience and community trust during crises. **Conclusion:** This research provides a foundation for developing policies and best practices, ensuring that businesses in Sabah are better equipped to navigate future health-related disruptions while safeguarding public health and economic stability.

Keywords: COVID-19, Standard Operating Procedure (SOPs), lesson learned, business premises, public health