J. Res. Technol. Eng. 6 (2), 2025, 85-94

Journal Of Research Technology & Engineering
www.jrte.org

Enhancing Safety and Productivity: The Role of Smart Wearables for Ageing Workers in the Construction Industry

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Received:23 Feb 2025; Revised: 28 Mar 2025; Accepted: 30 Mar 2025; Available online: 10 Apr 2025

Abstract— The construction industry is one of the most physically demanding sectors, posing significant challenges for ageing workers due to declining physical strength, slower reflexes, and increased susceptibility to workplace injuries. The integration of smart wearable technology provides an innovative solution to mitigate these challenges by enhancing safety, monitoring health metrics, and optimizing productivity. Smart wearables, including exoskeletons, biometric sensors, smart helmets, augmented reality (AR) glasses, and smart vests, offer real-time monitoring, injury prevention, and efficiency enhancements through data-driven insights. These technologies help detect early signs of fatigue, track posture, measure vital signs, and alert workers to hazardous conditions, thereby reducing workplace accidents and improving overall well-being.

This paper explores the adoption of smart wearables in the construction industry, particularly among the ageing workforce, analysing their benefits, challenges, and future potential. A comprehensive investigation is conducted using case studies, surveys, and industry reports to assess the effectiveness of wearable technology in reducing occupational hazards and increasing job retention among older workers. Additionally, statistical analyses, including correlation and regression models, are employed to evaluate the impact of wearable technology on key performance indicators such as accident rates, productivity, and worker health. The findings highlight the necessity for wider adoption of smart wearables, addressing barriers such as cost, resistance to change, and technological literacy, while also emphasizing the role of policymakers and industry stakeholders in facilitating smoother integration.

Index Terms— Ageing workforce, construction safety, smart wearables, workplace productivity.

1. Introduction

The construction industry is one of the most physically demanding and hazardous sectors, requiring workers to perform strenuous activities such as lifting heavy materials, working at elevated heights, and operating complex machinery. The physically intensive nature of construction work, combined with exposure to extreme environmental conditions, significantly increases the risk of occupational injuries and health complications, particularly for the ageing workforce [1]. As workers age, they experience a natural decline in physical strength, flexibility, and reflexes, making them more susceptible to musculoskeletal disorders, fatigue, and work-related injuries. Studies indicate that older construction workers are at a higher risk of severe injuries due to reduced balance, slower reaction times, and decreased endurance levels [2].

With a growing number of older employees in the construction workforce, ensuring their safety and efficiency has become a major concern for industry stakeholders, policymakers, and occupational health professionals. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), the percentage of construction workers over the age of 50 has increased in many developed and developing countries, leading to concerns regarding their ability to perform physically demanding tasks safely and efficiently [3]. Additionally, construction-related accidents remain a significant challenge, with falls, electrocutions, and heavy machinery accidents being the leading causes of fatalities [4].

To address these challenges, the adoption of smart wearable technology has emerged as a transformative solution in the construction industry. Smart wearables, including exoskeletons, biometric sensors, smart helmets, augmented reality (AR) glasses, and smart vests, offer real-time health monitoring, injury prevention, and enhanced operational efficiency [5]. These devices are designed to track vital health parameters, detect early signs of fatigue, improve posture, and alert workers and supervisors to potential hazards. For instance, exoskeletons provide physical support by reducing strain on muscles and joints, allowing older workers to perform tasks with reduced fatigue and lower injury risk [6]. Similarly, biometric sensors embedded in smart vests can monitor heart rate, blood pressure, and hydration levels, enabling proactive health interventions [7].

The integration of wearable technology in the construction industry has gained traction due to its potential to enhance worker safety, optimize productivity, and prolong the careers of ageing employees. Recent studies have shown a direct correlation between the adoption of wearable devices and a reduction in workplace injuries. For example, a study conducted by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) found that companies implementing smart wearables reported a 35% decrease in workplace accidents and a 20% improvement in worker efficiency [8]. Moreover, smart helmets equipped with augmented reality features provide real-time navigation, hazard detection, and hands-free communication, enhancing situational awareness and operational accuracy [9].

Despite these advancements, challenges remain regarding the adoption of smart wearables in the construction industry. Factors such as cost, resistance to new technology, data privacy concerns, and the need for specialized training hinder widespread implementation [10]. Additionally, the effectiveness of wearable devices depends on seamless integration with existing construction workflows and compliance with occupational safety regulations. Industry leaders, policymakers, and technology developers must collaborate to overcome these barriers and facilitate the adoption of wearable solutions tailored to the needs of the ageing construction workforce.

This paper explores the role of smart wearables in addressing the unique challenges faced by ageing construction workers. It examines the adoption trends, benefits, and limitations of wearable technology, supported by data-driven analysis, case studies, and statistical models. Furthermore, this study provides insights into how wearable technology can enhance worker safety, extend career longevity, and contribute to overall industry sustainability. By highlighting key trends and addressing adoption challenges, this research aims to pave the way for a safer and more inclusive construction workforce.

2. Literature Review

The integration of wearable technology in industrial settings has been extensively studied over the past decade, with significant emphasis on improving occupational safety, worker productivity, and overall job satisfaction. In the construction industry, where workers face hazardous environments, smart wearables have been recognized as an essential tool for minimizing risks and enhancing workforce efficiency. Various studies conducted by international safety organizations, industry experts, and academic researchers highlight the transformative role of wearable technology in addressing the challenges posed by an ageing workforce.

2.1 Importance of Wearable Technology in Construction Safety

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) and the International Labor Organization (ILO) have advocated for the use of wearable technology to improve workplace safety and operational efficiency [11]. Research conducted by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics indicates that construction-related injuries account for approximately 20% of all occupational fatalities, making it one of the most dangerous industries globally [12]. The need for improved safety measures has driven the adoption of wearable devices such as exoskeletons, biometric sensors, and smart helmets, which actively monitor worker health and environmental conditions.

A study by Lingard and Rowlinson (2021) examined the impact of biometric wearables on reducing occupational hazards. Their findings suggest that wearable sensors capable of detecting fatigue, dehydration, and abnormal heart rates can significantly lower the risk of accidents among ageing construction workers [13]. Similarly, a case study by Davis et al. (2022) highlighted how companies implementing wearable technology reported a 30% decrease in workplace accidents, reinforcing the need for widespread adoption [14].

2.2 Smart Wearables and Workforce Productivity

The application of smart wearables extends beyond safety to improving worker productivity. Augmented reality (AR) glasses, smart helmets, and wearable GPS trackers facilitate hands-free communication, navigation, and task management, enhancing operational efficiency [15]. Research by Zhang et al. (2022) found that construction firms that incorporated AR-based smart helmets experienced a 25% improvement in task accuracy and a 20% reduction in project delays [16]. The study concluded that wearable technology enables real-time data sharing, allowing workers to receive remote guidance and reducing the need for physical supervision.

Exoskeletons have also been extensively studied for their role in reducing musculoskeletal strain. A systematic review by Murashov et al. (2021) analyzed the benefits of exoskeletons in physically demanding jobs and found that their use in construction sites significantly reduced worker fatigue and increased endurance, particularly for ageing employees [17]. Another study by Park and Kim (2023) demonstrated that workers using lower-body exoskeletons were able to lift heavier loads with 40% less muscle strain compared to workers without assistive devices [18].

2.3 Challenges and Barriers to Adoption

Despite the proven benefits, the adoption of wearable technology in the construction industry faces several challenges. Studies indicate that cost, resistance to change, data privacy concerns, and the need for specialized training are key barriers preventing widespread implementation [19]. A survey conducted by the Construction Industry Institute (CII) revealed that while 78% of construction companies recognize the advantages of wearables, only 35% have actively integrated them into their operations [20]. The primary concerns cited include high upfront costs and uncertainty regarding return on investment (ROI). Moreover, technological literacy among ageing workers has been identified as a major hindrance. A report by Choudhury and Ahmed (2023) found that older workers less likely to adopt wearable technology due to unfamiliarity with digital interfaces and concerns over data security [21]. Privacy concerns related to the continuous monitoring of biometric data also contribute to hesitancy among workers, regulatory bodies [22]

2.4 Correlation Between Wearable Technology and Workplace Safety

Several studies have examined the correlation between the adoption of wearable technology and improvements in workplace safety. A meta-analysis by Silva et al. (2022) reviewed 50 studies on smart wearables in construction and found a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.78$) between wearable adoption and workplace injury reduction [23]. Additionally, a longitudinal study by Greenfield and Clarke (2023) observed a decline in accident rates over five years in construction firms implementing smart wearable solutions [24].

Regression analysis conducted by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) further supports these findings. Their study demonstrated that companies utilizing smart wearables had a statistically significant decrease in lost workdays due to injuries, with a p-value of <0.05 indicating a strong relationship between wearable adoption and reduced injury rates [25].

2.5 Future Trends and Research Directions

The rapid advancements in artificial intelligence (AI), the Internet of Things (IoT), and wearable sensor technology are expected to drive further innovations in smart wearables for construction. Research by Singh et al. (2024) suggests that AI-powered predictive analytics will enable real-time hazard detection, allowing for preemptive interventions to prevent accidents [26]. Emerging trends also point towards the development of more lightweight and ergonomically designed exoskeletons, enhancing comfort and usability for ageing workers [27].

Another promising area of research focuses on integrating blockchain technology to address data privacy concerns. Studies indicate that decentralized data management systems can provide secure storage and access to biometric information, alleviating privacy-related apprehensions among workers [28]. Future research should explore the long-term effects of wearable technology adoption, including its impact on workforce retention, psychological well-being, and economic viability.

3. Methodology

This research employs a mixed-method approach that integrates both quantitative and qualitative methodologies to provide a comprehensive understanding of the impact of smart wearables on the ageing workforce in the construction industry. This section outlines the research design, data collection methods, sampling techniques, and data analysis procedures used in the study.

3.1 Research Design

A mixed-method approach was selected to capture both statistical trends and individual experiences related to the adoption and effectiveness of wearable technology. This study incorporates:

- Quantitative Analysis: Statistical evaluation of workplace accidents, productivity metrics, and adoption rates of smart wearables.
- Qualitative Analysis: Interviews and case studies to understand workers' experiences, challenges, and perceptions regarding wearable technology.

This combination ensures that the study provides objective statistical validation while also considering the subjective perspectives of workers and industry stakeholders.

3.2 Data Collection Methods

Data collection was carried out using the following approaches:

3.2.1 Surveys

A structured questionnaire survey was designed and distributed among 500 construction workers across 200 construction sites to gather information on:

- Awareness and adoption of smart wearable devices.
- Perceived benefits and concerns.
- Impact on workplace safety and efficiency.
- Willingness to adopt new wearable technologies.

The survey consisted of 30 closed-ended questions rated on a Likert scale (1–5), where 1 = Strongly Disagree and 5 = Strongly Agree.

3.2.2 Interviews

To gain deeper insights, semi-structured interviews were conducted with:

- 30 ageing construction workers (aged 50+) using or considering wearable technology.
- 15 site managers/safety officers overseeing safety protocols.
- 10 industry experts from technology firms specializing in wearable technology.

Each interview lasted 30–45 minutes, focusing on real-world applications, implementation challenges, and cost-benefit analysis.

3.2.3 Case Studies

Four case studies from leading construction companies that have implemented wearable technologies were analysed. These companies had:

- Adopted biometric wearables for real-time health monitoring.
- Implemented exoskeletons for physically demanding tasks.
- Used AR-based smart helmets for enhanced operational efficiency.

Each case study provided insights into implementation challenges, accident reduction trends, and workforce adaptation rates.

3.2.4 Observational Studies

Field observations were conducted at 10 active construction sites where smart wearables were in use. Researchers recorded:

- Frequency of wearable technology usage.
- Worker engagement and adaptability.
- On-site challenges in integrating wearables.

4. Findings and Data Analysis

The data analysis highlights the adoption rates, benefits, and correlation between wearable technology and safety improvements in construction. The following visuals provide an in-depth analysis of the data collected.

4.1 Adoption Rate of Smart Wearables

The adoption rate of smart wearables in the construction industry varies based on factors such as company size, worker awareness, and cost. Survey data indicates that approximately 65% of companies have integrated some form of wearable technology, while 35% are either hesitant or in the early stages of implementation. The primary barriers include cost (40%), lack of awareness (30%), and resistance to technology (25%), with 5% citing other factors.

Key Observations:

- Large construction firms (with over 500 employees) show a higher adoption rate (75%) compared to small firms (45%).

- Companies investing in worker safety programs are more likely to adopt wearables.
- The most widely used smart wearables include biometric sensors (55%), smart helmets (30%), and exoskeletons (15%).

4.2 Benefits of Smart Wearables

Smart wearables provide multiple benefits, including injury prevention, real-time monitoring, and productivity enhancement. The data collected from construction workers and managers highlights the following benefits:

Table 1. Percentage of respondents

Benefit	Percentage of Respondents Reporting Improvement
Injury Prevention	70%
Reduced Fatigue	65%
Improved Productivity	60%
Better Health Monitoring	55%
Enhanced Safety Compliance	50%

Table 1 illustrates several significant benefits associated with the use of wearable technologies in the workplace. Notably, 70% of respondents reported a reduction in injuries, particularly attributed to the implementation of biometric sensors that continuously monitor heart rate and fatigue levels. Additionally, the use of exoskeletons was found to decrease muscle strain by 50%, offering substantial support to older employees who may experience difficulty with physically demanding tasks such as heavy lifting. Furthermore, smart helmets integrated with augmented reality capabilities enhanced task efficiency by 40%, as workers benefited from real-time guidance and visual assistance. These findings underscore the potential of wearable technologies to improve occupational health, safety, and productivity across various industries.

4.3 Correlation between Wearable Adoption and Injury Reduction

To assess the impact of wearables on workplace injuries, a correlation analysis was performed. The Pearson correlation coefficient (r) was calculated to determine the strength of the relationship between wearable adoption rates and injury reduction.

Findings:

- The correlation coefficient $r = -0.78$, indicating a strong negative correlation between wearable adoption and injury rates.
- As wearable adoption increases, reported injuries decrease significantly.
- Companies with above 60% adoption rates experienced a 40% reduction in injuries compared to those with lower adoption rates.

4.4 Regression Analysis: Wearable Adoption vs Injury Reduction

A regression analysis was conducted to determine the predictive relationship between wearable adoption and injury reduction. The linear regression model is represented as:

$$Y=\beta 0+\beta 1X+\epsilon \quad \text{Equation 1}$$

Where:

- Y = Injury Reduction (%)
- X = Wearable Adoption (%)
- β_0 (Intercept) = 5.2
- β_1 (Slope) = -0.62 (indicating that for every 1% increase in wearable adoption, injury rates reduce by 0.62%)
- R^2 = 0.61, meaning 61% of the variability in injury reduction is explained by wearable adoption.

According to Eq. 1, which models the relationship between wearable adoption and injury reduction, several significant trends emerge. Companies with higher levels of wearable integration exhibit a consistent decline in injury rates, highlighting the positive correlation between increased adoption and improved workplace safety. Older employees aged 50 and above benefit most from these technologies, with a reported 50% reduction in work-related musculoskeletal disorders. Furthermore, predictive modeling using Eq. 1 suggests that if wearable adoption reaches 85%, industry-wide injury rates could decline by up to 50% compared to current levels. These findings emphasize the transformative potential of wearable technologies in enhancing occupational health, particularly for vulnerable workforce segments.

5. Conclusion

This research has explored the impact of smart wearables on the ageing workforce in the construction industry, emphasizing the adoption, benefits, challenges, and future potential of these technologies. The study, through a mixed-method approach that integrated surveys, interviews, case studies, and observational studies, has highlighted the growing adoption of smart wearables across construction sites. While larger construction firms are leading the way, the implementation of wearable technology in smaller firms remains limited due to barriers such as cost, resistance to change, and lack of awareness. Despite these challenges, the study found that the adoption of smart wearables significantly enhances worker safety and productivity. Technologies such as biometric sensors, exoskeletons, and augmented reality helmets have demonstrated a clear ability to reduce physical strain on workers, particularly ageing ones, and increase operational efficiency.

The findings further revealed a strong correlation between the use of wearables and the reduction of workplace injuries. Companies that adopted wearable technologies reported up to a 50% reduction in workplace injuries, indicating the critical role these technologies can play in enhancing worker safety. Regression analysis also suggested that the more widely wearable technologies are adopted, the more predictable the reduction in injury rates will be. Despite these benefits, challenges such as the high cost of wearables, resistance from workers towards new technology, and the need for specialized training remain significant hurdles to broader implementation. The study concludes that smart wearables offer a promising solution to improve safety, health, and productivity among the ageing workforce in the construction industry, but their widespread adoption will require addressing these barriers.

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