

Psychosocial hazards



What are psychosocial hazards?

Psychosocial hazards are factors in the design, systems or management of work that might create a risk to the psychological and physical health and safety of employees. In the workplace, psychosocial hazards can fall into a few different categories:



JOB DESIGN

- Low job control
- High and low job demands
- Low role clarity
- Violent or traumatic events



TEAM/GROUP FACTORS

- Poor support
- Poor workplace relationships
- Remote and isolated work



ORGANISATIONAL FACTORS

- Poor organisational justice
- Low recognition and reward
- Poor environmental conditions
- Poor organisational change management

What are the risks of psychosocial hazards?

In the short term, exposure to work-related psychosocial hazards might not cause harm to employees if they are managed well. The health, safety and wellbeing of employees is at risk if stressful situations continue for an extended period of time, are poorly managed, or left unresolved.



- When psychosocial hazards combine and act together, there is a greater risk to employee mental health.
- Some employees may be more susceptible to harm from psychosocial hazards e.g. new employees, young employees, employees previously exposed to violent or traumatic events.
- The cause of work-related stress from exposure to psychosocial hazards is likely to be specific to the employee, work or workplace.

Identifying work-related psychosocial hazards

Identifying work-related psychosocial hazards is an important part of a risk management approach to workplace mental health. Workplaces are obligated, so far as reasonably practicable, to consult with employees on health and safety matters, including:



The identification and assessment of psychosocial hazards



Decisions about how to control risks to physical or psychological health and safety

Early identification and management of work-related psychosocial hazards helps to create a mentally healthy workplace.

Psychosocial hazards

11 common psychosocial hazards and how to recognise them

REMOTE OR ISOLATED WORK

Work where access to communications, support or resources is difficult. For example:

- access to help from others in an emergency is difficult, e.g. outreach work
- limited access to reliable communication
- limited opportunities for feedback and problem sharing
- limited opportunities for social interaction
- blurred boundaries between home and work

POOR WORKPLACE RELATIONS

Relationships between workers and their leaders, colleagues, supervisors or patients are poor or conflictual. For example:

- workers experience bullying, aggression, harassment, gendered violence, discrimination and other unreasonable behaviours by supervisors, colleagues or patients
- poor relationships between workers and people they need to interact with at work, e.g. managers, supervisors, colleagues or service users

POOR ORGANISATIONAL JUSTICE

Inconsistency, unfairness or bias in the way things are done.

For example:

- inconsistent application of organisation policies and procedures
- resources are allocated unfairly
- under-performance poorly managed
- bias in the approval of leave requests

EXPOSURE TO VIOLENT OR TRAUMATIC EVENTS

Direct or indirect exposure to a deeply distressing or potentially traumatic event or content (as a single event, or cumulative exposure over time). For example:

- exposure to abuse, threat of harm or actual harm
- witnessing or experiencing situations that involve serious injury, death or threat to life, self-injury

LOW JOB CONTROL

Little or no control over how or when aspects of a job are done. For example:

- workers not involved in decision making about work that affects them (or their patients)
- workers have little say in when they can take a break or change tasks

LOW ROLE CLARITY

Expectations or responsibilities of the job are unclear.

For example:

- information needed to perform tasks is unavailable
- uncertainty about, or frequent changes to work standards or tasks

POOR ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE MANAGEMENT

Limited consideration given to the impact of change on existing processes, or the introduction of new processes.

For example:

- workers not consulted about major changes
- practical support not available to workers during times of transition

POOR RECOGNITION AND REWARD

Lack of positive feedback on job and task performance, and lack of opportunity for development. For example:

- worker effort not recognised, either formally or informally
- skills and experience are under-used
- good performance not recognised

HIGH AND LOW JOB DEMANDS

Sustained levels of high physical, mental or emotional effort required to do the job. For example:

- high mental workload
- exposure to emotionally distressing situations (high emotional demands)
- shift work leading to a higher risk of fatigue
- excessive or insufficient workload

POOR ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS

Workers exposed to hazardous or poor quality work environments. For example:

- high noise levels
- extreme temperatures
- hazardous manual handling

POOR SUPPORT

Lack of practical or emotional support provided. For example:

- insufficient or inappropriate support from leaders, co-workers or colleagues
- information or training required to do the job is not available or provided
- resources and equipment needed to do work are not provided

For more information



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