



**Corporate Mental Health
Alliance** AUSTRALIA



Managing Psychosocial Risk in the Workplace:

Additional Resources

Additional information on psychosocial hazards and risk

Psychological hazards are defined as:

“aspects of job content, work organisation and management and environmental and organisational conditions that have the potential for psychological and physical harm” (Cox, 1993).

The description of these hazards is based on an extensive research tradition which has identified job demands (workplace factors that can cause stress) and job resources (workplace factors that can protect you from stress) that have been identified in research.

Common psychosocial hazards and some examples are included in the table, arranged related to how work is organised, social factors at work and aspects of the work environment, equipment, and hazardous tasks.

People will at various times refer to psychosocial hazards, or psychosocial risks, depending on the context. Hazards are situations or things that have the potential to harm a person. Risk is the possibility that harm might occur following exposure to a hazard (See SafeWork NSW, 2019).

The exact wording of the hazards/risks will also change across publications, so you might like to check the relevant Code of Practice or guidance material used by your organisation.

Following are some common examples of psychosocial hazards, coupled with specific examples for each hazard. This list is not absolute and similarly with the wording of hazards/risks, it is useful to review literature used in your organisation to ensure the most relevant understanding possible.





Psychosocial hazard	Examples
How work is organised	
Role overload (high workloads or job demands)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Too much to do in a set time • Unachievable task deadlines, expectations or responsibilities • Unpredictable shifts or hours of work, shift structures or rosters that do not allow adequate time for workers to recover • Multiple tasks that require rapid switching between each to complete • Sustained or frequent exposure to emotionally distressing situations • Tasks and decisions that are safety critical
Role underload (low workloads or job demands)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Too little to do • Highly repetitive or monotonous work
Exposure to traumatic events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing care to those experiencing a traumatic event • Listening to, viewing, or reading descriptions about traumatic events • Experiencing, witnessing, or investigating a serious near miss, injury or fatality
Role conflict or lack of role clarity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conflicting priorities in a role • Uncertainty around roles, tenure, tasks, work schedules and standards
Low job control	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Little control in how work is done and when breaks can be taken • Lack of control over workload • Limited opportunity to participate in decision making • Limited opportunity to contribute to WHS and the way work is done
Remote or isolated work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working in locations that are far from home, family, friends and usual support networks • Working alone (social or physical isolation) • Working in private homes • Working in environments without telecommunications reception to connect with professional and social networks
Poor organisational change consultation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of practical support to assist workers during transition periods • Prolonged or recurring restructuring • Poor consultation or communication about workplace changes
Job security and precarious work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uncertainty about work availability • Possibility of redundancy/redistribution to another role • Low-paid or insecure employment • Lack of protection from labour law or social protection
Social factors at work	
Conflict or poor workplace relationships between workers and their supervisors and managers and co-workers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor two-way communication • Poor relationships between managers, supervisors, co-workers, and clients or others that workers interact with • Harmful workplace behaviours
Poor support from supervisors and managers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor communication • Poor information sharing • Lack of constructive feedback
Poor co-worker support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inadequate information sharing • Inadequate advice and help for work tasks • Lack of social support

Workplace violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incidents involving an explicit or implied challenge to health, safety or well-being at work by co-workers, clients, visitors or others • Physical, verbal, sexual or gender-based threats, abuse or assault
Bullying	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Repeated unreasonable behaviours which can present a risk to health, safety and well-being at work. Some examples of these behaviours can include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social or physical isolation • Assigning meaningless or unfavourable tasks • Name-calling • Insults and intimidation • Undermining behaviours • Undue public criticism • Withholding information or resources critical to do tasks • Malicious rumours or gossiping • Assigning impossible deadlines <p>See the Safe Work Australia's National Guidelines on Workplace Bullying for further information</p>
Harassment including sexual harassment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unwanted, offensive intimidating behaviours by co-workers, clients, visitors or others around a person's race, religion, beliefs, gender, age, sexual orientation or disability
Inadequate reward and recognition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Efforts not recognised • Lack of opportunity for career development • Lack of opportunities for promotion, skill development and career development
Poor procedural justice (processes for making decisions)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Withholding information • Lack of fairness • Inconsistent and poor decision-making processes
Organisational / workgroup culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low levels of support for problem-solving and personal development • Lack of definition of organisational objectives • Inconsistent application of policies and procedures • Unfair decision-making
Civility and respect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of trust, honesty, respect, civility, and fairness
Work environment, equipment and hazardous tasks	
Hazardous physical working environments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of space • Poor lighting • Excessive noise • Poor ventilation/air flow
Lack of resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack or low supply of tools, equipment or other resources to complete work tasks (e.g. a lack of appropriate PPE) • Lack or low supply of suitable tools or equipment • Poor equipment or tool maintenance
Extreme conditions or situations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work performed at very high or very low temperatures • Work performed at heights
Unstable environments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conflict zones • Disaster zones

Additional information on risk controls

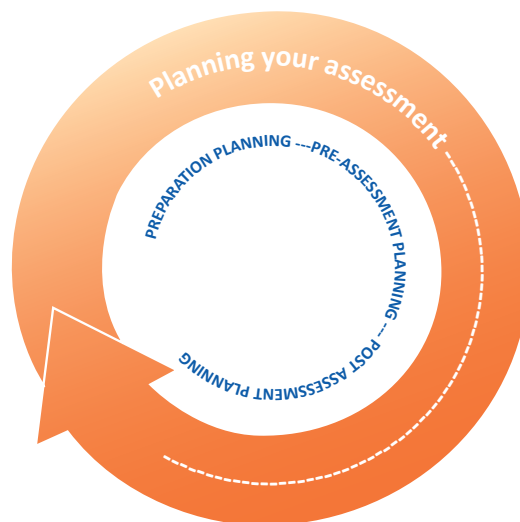
Controls for psychosocial risks should follow the same principles as for other risks at work. Risks should be eliminated, and where that is not possible, minimised. Consistent with WHS practice, the principle is that the hazards should be controlled at their source, using the most effective risk controls, rather than relying on less effective controls that do not address the source of harm. This means for example, prioritising the provision of additional job control, or reducing workload, or increasing supervision and managerial support, rather than only sending workers to resilience training, or employee assistance programs. A range of controls are likely needed to be used together at the same time.

A range of guidance on risk controls is available, including examples of risk controls for various psychosocial risks. These comprise the Codes of Practice and ISO45003.



Psychosocial risk assessment planning tool

Planning is critical for successful risk assessment processes. You may have noticed that planning is discussed at different stages of the risk assessment process and through all four documents. This is because planning is required when doing the initial research to understand your organisational context ('preparation planning'), prior to undertaking your risk assessment (pre-assessment planning), and when you are designing and preparing to implement an action plan based on findings from your risk assessment ('post-assessment planning').



Planning for assessment	Preparation	What sources of information do you already have about psychosocial risks in your organisation?	e.g., past injuries, risk register
		How is this information limited?	e.g., information is dated, not available across all worksites
		How does your work and organisational context affect your psychosocial risk profile? <i>i.e., what are the likely risks for you?</i>	e.g., CALD workforce, young workers in location X, exposure to customer aggression
	Pre assessment	What type of assessment seems right for your needs, scope, skills and resources?, <i>survey, interview, limited roll-out</i>	e.g., desire to pilot in two smaller locations; most locations have survey fatigue; representative focus groups may be preferred
		How and when will you communicate with leaders about the assessment?	e.g., senior leadership meeting presentation; updates on progress
		How and when will you engage with workers about the assessment?	e.g., before proposed implementation; use of video with senior leader talking about the process plus documentation on how the data will be used, and how workers can be involved in planning actions
		What consultation processes will you implement throughout the assessment process?	e.g., use of WHS consultation mechanisms plus EOIs for participating in steer co
		What resources will you need to complete the assessment, interpret and report on its findings?	e.g., support from business analytics team and HR personnel; external consultant review/advice
	Post assessment	How will you communicate with leaders, and workers, about the results of the assessment?	e.g., brief summary of results will be shared internally to all staff; full report to leadership team
		How will you develop actions based on the assessment?	e.g., steering co comprised of workers from all levels across sites A and B; externally facilitated
		How will you evaluate the assessment process, and the implementation of actions, to help you decide what to do next?	e.g., planned assessment of process via brief feedback surveys from steer co and line managers; reports on trends in injury reporting, EAP usage data, results of subsequent engagement survey

Consultation planning

Consultation with key stakeholders who will affect and/or be affected by any organisational changes is imperative through the entire risk assessment process (from preparation planning through to post-assessment planning).

It is important to understand that consultation takes many forms throughout this process at different stages of the risk assessment process, and planning your consultation strategy will improve your chance of collecting reliable data and engaging the right people to take action, thus leading to successful and impactful outcomes.

Use the guide questions following in advance of commencing any work on your psychosocial risk assessment to understand when and how you need to consult during the process. We have provided some suggestions of how you could approach each guide question to get you started.



What form does it take?

Consultation does not always have to be formal. It can include informal discussions

What's involved?

Consultation is not the same as seeking feedback on something that is already decided. It involves sharing information with workers, enabling them to express their views, contribute to decision making, and have those views taken into account.

What else do I have to do?

Comprehensive and well-planned consultation may be enough to identify the psychosocial risks in your workplace and develop action plans, without other strategies.

Who do we talk to?

Identifying the right stakeholders will change depending on scope and size of the business. It's important to provide opportunities to be consulted, perhaps through an EOI process. Aiming of a "diagonal slice" can be useful to ensure a range of perspectives but consider issues of comfort in speaking up.

Why should we consult?

Consultation and participation can save time and resources by identifying the most appropriate solutions that are appropriate to your business context. In addition, they help build trust, so that your risk controls have a better chance of engagement and success.

How do we engage?

Consider the methods that work for your people – face to face conversations, written feedback, meetings, focus groups, depending on their needs and preferences.

How much is enough?

Typically, when you start hearing nothing new, you may have reached the point where its ok to stop consulting.

When do I consult?

Consultation can be useful at all stages of planning a psychosocial risk assessment but may take different formats at different stages.

Referenced literature and other useful links

Referenced literature

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Other useful links

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