

3 Identify psychosocial hazards

The first step in the risk management process is to identify psychosocial hazards. This involves identifying the aspects of work and situations that could potentially harm your workers or others at your workplace and why these may be occurring. This step should also assist PCBUs to identify where and when workers are exposed to psychosocial hazards, and if controls are not adequately eliminating or minimising risks from known hazards.



3.1 Common psychosocial hazards

Below is a list of some common examples of psychosocial hazards you should consider when identifying psychosocial hazards in your organisation. The list and the examples in the descriptions are not exhaustive. Workers are likely to be exposed to a combination of psychosocial hazards; some risks may be constantly present, while others arise sporadically.

Some hazards by themselves may cause serious harm, such as experiencing workplace violence. In most circumstances, it will be a combination of psychosocial hazards which together may cause harm. Harm can be caused by a single instance or over time with repeated or prolonged exposure.

Hazards can be grouped or described in different ways. How they are categorised is less important than ensuring you and your workers have the same understanding of what is happening and how it may be causing harm.

Hazard	Descriptions
Job demands	<p>Intense or sustained high mental, physical or emotional effort required to do the job.</p> <p>Unreasonable or excessive time pressures or role overload.</p> <p>High individual reputational, legal, career, safety or financial risk if mistakes occur.</p> <p>High vigilance required, limited margin of error and inadequate systems to prevent individual error.</p> <p>Shifts/work hours that do not allow adequate time for sleep and recovery.</p> <p>Sustained low levels of physical, mental or emotional effort is required to do the job.</p> <p>Long idle periods while high workloads are present, for example where workers need to wait for equipment or other workers.</p>

Hazard	Descriptions
Low job control	<p>Workers have little control over aspects of the work including how or when the job is done.</p> <p>Workers have limited ability to adapt the way they work to changing or new situations.</p> <p>Workers have limited ability to adopt efficiencies in their work.</p> <p>Tightly scripted or machine/computer paced work.</p> <p>Prescriptive processes which do not allow workers to apply their skills and judgement.</p> <p>Levels of autonomy not matched to workers' abilities.</p>
Poor support	<p>Tasks or jobs where workers have inadequate support including practical assistance and emotional support from managers and colleagues, or inadequate training, tools and resources for a task.</p>
Lack of role clarity	<p>Uncertainty, frequent changes, conflicting roles or ambiguous responsibilities and expectations.</p>
Poor organisational change management	<p>Insufficient consultation, consideration of new hazards or performance impacts when planning for, and implementing, change.</p> <p>Insufficient support, information or training during change.</p> <p>Not communicating key information to workers during periods of change.</p>
Inadequate reward and recognition	<p>Jobs with low positive feedback or imbalances between effort and recognition.</p> <p>High level of unconstructive negative feedback from managers or customers.</p> <p>Low skills development opportunity or underused skills.</p>
Poor organisational justice	<p>Inconsistent, unfair, discriminatory or inequitable management decisions and application of policies, including poor procedural justice.</p>
Traumatic events or material	<p>Experiencing fear or extreme risks to the health or safety of themselves or others.</p> <p>Exposure to natural disasters, or seriously injured or deceased persons.</p> <p>Reading, hearing or seeing accounts of traumatic events, abuse or neglect.</p> <p>Supporting victims or investigating traumatic events, abuse or neglect.</p>
Remote or isolated work	<p>Working in locations with long travel times, or where access to help, resources or communications is difficult or limited.</p>

Hazard	Descriptions
Poor physical environment	Exposure to unpleasant or hazardous working environments.
Violence and aggression	Violence, or threats of violence from other workers (including workers of other businesses), customers, patients or clients (including assault). Aggressive behaviour such as yelling or physical intimidation.
Bullying	Repeated unreasonable behaviour directed towards a worker or group of workers that creates a risk to health and safety. ² This includes bullying by workers, clients, patients, visitors or others.
Harassment including sexual harassment	Harassment due to personal characteristics such as age, disability, race, nationality, religion, political affiliation, sex, relationship status, family or carer responsibilities, sexual orientation, gender identity or intersex status. Sexual harassment - any unwelcome sexual advance, unwelcome request for sexual favours or other unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature, in circumstances where a reasonable person, having regard to all the circumstances, would anticipate the possibility that the person harassed would be offended, humiliated or intimidated. ³ Harmful behaviour that does not amount to bullying (such as single instances) but creates a risk to health or safety.
Conflict or poor workplace relationships and interactions	Poor workplace relationships or interpersonal conflict between colleagues or from other businesses, clients or customers. Frequent disagreements, disparaging or rude comments, either from one person or multiple people, such as from clients or customers. A worker can be both the subject and the source of this behaviour. Inappropriately excluding a worker from work-related activities.

² Bullying is defined in Safe Work Australia Guidance and the *Fair Work Act 2009 (Commonwealth)*.
³ Legal definitions of 'sexual harassment' may vary in each state and territory.