

Everyone deserves to be safe at work and treated with respect. There's no place in the resources sector for inappropriate behaviour such as sexual harassment, bullying and racism.

Workplaces have an obligation to protect the health and safety of workers under Queensland's resources safety and health legislation. This includes managing the risk of exposure to psychosocial hazards.

Psychosocial hazards include risks associated with factors such as work design, administration, the working environment and the equipment and facilities present in a workplace. Additionally, they involve interactions or behaviours exhibited within the workplace (Refer to Table 1 below for specific details).

Multiple psychosocial hazards may be present in the workplace at any time¹, and these hazards may combine, leading to an increased risk of harm occurring.

Workplace relationships and social interactions are common psychosocial hazards. This includes inappropriate behaviours such as sexual harassment, bullying, racism, violence, and aggression, all of which could cause physical and psychological harm.

Some workers may have a greater risk of exposure to psychosocial hazards than others. These could include minority cohorts within the workforce, such as female workers, younger workers, First Nations workers and workers with diverse needs.

Table 1. Psychosocial hazards that may arise at work

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Job demands• Low job control• Poor support• Lack of role clarity• Poor organisational change management• Inadequate reward and recognition• Poor organisational justice• Traumatic events or material	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Remote or isolated work• Poor physical environment• Violence and aggression• Bullying• Harassment including sexual harassment• Conflict or poor workplace relationships and interactions
---	--	---

*Appendix A Job characteristics, design and management and Appendix B Harmful behaviours provide further guidance and examples for each hazard.

¹ Workplace Health and Safety Queensland, Managing the risk of psychosocial hazards at work Code of Practice, 2022.

² Safe Work Australia, Model Code of Practice: Managing psychosocial hazards at work, 2022.

Impact of Psychosocial Hazards on Individuals

When psychosocial hazards are not controlled within the workplace, workers may experience feelings of stress. While stress itself is not an injury, prolonged exposure to stress can lead to both psychological and physical harm over time.

Generally, people take longer to recover and return to work following a psychological injury as opposed to a physical injury alone. Similarly, costs associated with psychological injury are generally higher, this can include direct and indirect costs associated with the worker's absence.

Psychosocial Risk Management

Psychosocial hazards need to be managed in the workplace through a risk management process. Identifying these hazards and assessing associated risks is essential, guiding the determination of necessary control measures.

Organisations may perform both a general psychosocial risk assessment and specific assessments tailored to site locations, operations and worker cohorts.

Methods of Consultation

Effective consultation is essential for managing workplace psychosocial hazards. This involves actively seeking input from all workers and their representatives on both the design and method of consultation.

Factors such as the workplace size, distribution of the workforce, nature of work and hazard types should be considered. Agreement on consultation formats, such as pre-job-start discussions, focus groups, surveys, committee meetings, team meetings, one on one discussions, is important. Ensuring all workers have on-site support during consultations on psychological hazards is equally critical to prevent potential participant distress in the process.

To overcome hesitancy in reporting sensitive issues like bullying or harassment, implementing anonymous reporting mechanisms, such as surveys, or reporting through a trusted peer or representative can address privacy concerns and alleviate fears of repercussions on employment or career progression.

Workers and their representatives should also be consulted when designing and implementing control measures for identified risks.

Factors to Consider in Assessing Risks

Several factors influence the level of psychosocial risks, including

- The design of work
- Systems of work
- Workplace environment
- Workers' accommodation
- Plant and structures
- Workplace interactions
- The information, training, instruction and supervision provided to workers

To assess the risk of harm, factors such as the duration, frequency and severity of exposure to psychosocial hazards should be considered collectively. A single or irregular exposure to these hazards may not create psychosocial risks, or the risks may be very low. Risks increase with the severity, frequency and duration of exposure and they may be compounded when workers face a combination of these mechanisms.

Implementing Control Measures

Information and Training

Providing information, training and clear communication on expected standards of behaviour, conflict resolution and reporting procedures is crucial. This includes training for both workers and management, regular handovers and understanding client conditions and behaviour management plans.

Design of the Work Environment

The design of the environment in which work is undertaken, including office, on-site, home workplace, vehicles, accommodation, shared facilities and amenities, can contribute to the risk of psychosocial hazards, such as inappropriate behaviour. The design, use, management and monitoring of work environments can result in certain behaviours occurring or expose people to behaviour-related psychosocial and physical risks, requiring consideration in psychosocial risk assessments.

Policies and Procedures

Implementation of workplace policies, enforcement of acceptable behaviour standards, fostering a positive work culture and addressing power imbalances are essential. Regular evaluation and review of work practices, incident responses, workloads, staffing levels and time pressures contribute to ongoing improvement and risk mitigation.

Diverse Needs and Consideration

Employees from diverse backgrounds may confront distinct psychosocial hazards. Specifically, individuals such as women, young workers, those from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds, members of the LGBTIQ+ community and workers with disabilities may be more susceptible to experiencing workplace sexual harassment. Acknowledging and addressing this increased risk is crucial and ensuring their specific vulnerabilities to psychosocial hazards are recognised and addressed is essential in promoting a safer work environment.

Further information and resources

- [ES-REA Psychological safety.pdf](#) (act.gov.au) (REA The Impact and Antecedents of Psychological Safety – a summary of the scientific literature, January 2020)
- [What is Psychological Safety?](#) (Harvard Business Review, 2023)
- [What is Psychological Safety?](#) (McKinsey & Company, 2023)
- [Supporting Safe and Respectful Workplaces – the Industry Actions to address the Enough is Enough Report](#) (Chamber of Minerals and Energy of Western Australia, 2023)
- [Respect@Work toolkit](#) (Minerals Council of Australia, 2021)