



Appendix C - Examples of Psychosocial Hazards

From Comcare Work Health and Safety (Managing Psychosocial Hazards at Work) Code of Practice 2024¹.

Job demands

High job demands

High job demands means high levels of physical, mental or emotional effort are needed to do the job.

It means more than sometimes 'being a little busy'. High job demands become a hazard when severe (e.g. very high), prolonged (e.g. long term), or frequent (e.g. happens often).

High physical demands may include:

- working long hours or without enough breaks
- physically tiring tasks (e.g. lifting heavy boxes or digging trenches), or
- having too much to do in too little time.

High mental demands may include:

- not having the right skills or training for the task (e.g. junior workers given complex tasks), or
- not having systems to prevent individual errors, particularly when they may have high consequences (e.g. expecting workers to memorise complex processes and not providing written prompts).

High emotional demands may include:

- exposure to aggression, violence, harassment or bullying
- supporting people in distress (e.g. giving bad news), or
- displaying false emotions (e.g. being friendly to difficult customers).

Low job demands

Low job demands means sustained low levels of physical, mental or emotional effort are needed to do the job.

It is more than just having an occasional slow afternoon. Low job demands become a hazard when it is severe (e.g. very low demands), prolonged (e.g. long term) or frequent (e.g. happens often). For example:

- long idle periods, particularly if workers cannot do other tasks (e.g. while waiting for necessary tools)
- highly monotonous or repetitive tasks (e.g. packing products or monitoring production lines), or
- workers cannot maintain their skills (e.g. not enough role specific tasks to keep competencies).

¹ <https://www.legislation.gov.au/F2024L01380/latest/text>

Low job control

Low job control means workers have little control or say over the work. This includes over how or when the job is done.

Low job control is more than being given work to do. It becomes a hazard when it is severe (e.g. very low job control), prolonged (e.g. long term) or frequent (e.g. happens often).

Low job control may include:

- having little say over break times or when to switch tasks (e.g. work is machine or computer paced)
- needing permission for routine or low risk tasks (e.g. ordering standard monthly supplies or sending a low-risk internal email)
- strict processes that can't be changed to fit the situation, or
- workers level of autonomy doesn't match their role or abilities (e.g. supervisors don't have enough authority to do their jobs well).

Poor support

Poor support means not getting enough support from supervisors or other workers, or not having the resources needed to do the job well.

It is more than having to wait for someone to get out of a meeting to answer a non-urgent question. Poor support becomes a hazard when it is severe (e.g. very little support), prolonged (e.g. long term) or frequent (e.g. happens often).

Poor support may include:

- not having the things needed to do the work well, safely or on time (e.g. limited tools or faulty IT systems)
- not getting necessary information (e.g. information is unclear or not passed on in time)
- not enough supervisor support (e.g. supervisors aren't available to help, provide unclear guidance, take a long time to make decisions or are not empathetic)
- not being able to easily get help (e.g. workers can't leave their stations or are physically separated from others)
- a workplace culture that discourages support (e.g. highly competitive or critical workplaces), or
- inadequate co-worker support (e.g. workers are too busy to help each other).

Lack of role clarity

Lack of role clarity means workers aren't clear on their job, responsibilities or what is expected. This may happen when they aren't given the right information, or things keep changing.

It is more than sometimes being given a complex task. Lack of role clarity becomes a hazard when it is severe (e.g. very little clarity), prolonged (e.g. long term) or frequent (e.g. happens often).

Lack of role clarity may include:

- overlapping responsibilities (e.g. two workers given the same task)
- unclear roles and reporting lines (e.g. unclear who is responsible for what or who is working to which manager)
- conflicting or frequently changing expectations and work standards (e.g. changing deadlines or contradictory instructions)
- not being given information needed to do the job, or
- unclear work priorities (e.g. not knowing which tasks are most important or urgent).

Poor organisational change management

Poor organisational change management means changes that are poorly planned, communicated, supported or managed.

It is more than an unpopular change at work. Poor change management becomes a hazard when it is severe (e.g. very poor management), prolonged (e.g. long term) or frequent (e.g. happens often).

Poor organisational change management may include:

- not consulting on changes (e.g. not talking to workers or genuinely considering their views)
- not thinking about how a change may impact WHS risks <https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/glossary#whs> or workers' performance (e.g. not allowing extra time to do things while workers learn a new process)
- poorly planned changes (e.g. changes are disorganised or do not have a clear goal)
- changes are poorly communicated (e.g. information about the changes isn't provided or is unclear), or
- not enough support for the changes (e.g. not training workers on how to use new tools).

Inadequate reward and recognition

Inadequate reward and recognition means there is an imbalance between the efforts workers put in and the recognition or reward they get. Reward and recognition can be formal or informal.

It is more than not winning an award at work. Inadequate reward and recognition becomes a hazard when it is severe (e.g. very little reward and recognition), prolonged (e.g. long term) or frequent (e.g. happens often).

Inadequate reward and recognition may include:

- recognition and rewards that are unfair or biased (e.g. workers are rewarded for others work)
- not enough feedback or recognition (e.g. workers don't receive feedback on their work or guidance on how to improve)
- unfair negative feedback (e.g. criticism on things that are not within a workers control or that they haven't been taught how to do)
- limited development opportunities, or
- not recognising workers' skills (e.g. micromanaging simple tasks).

Poor organisational justice

Poor organisational justice means a lack of:

- procedural justice (e.g. fair decision-making processes)
- informational fairness (e.g. keeping everyone up to date and in the loop), or
- interpersonal fairness (e.g. treating people with dignity and respect).

It is more than a worker sometimes not getting the shift they asked for. Poor organisational justice becomes a hazard when it is severe (e.g. very poor organisational justice), prolonged (e.g. long term) or frequent (e.g. happens often).

Poor organisational justice may include:

- poor handling of workers information (e.g. not keeping personal information private)
- policies or procedures that are unfair, biased or applied inconsistently (e.g. favouritism when assigning 'good' shifts)
- blaming workers for things that aren't their fault, or they can't control
- not accommodating workers' reasonable needs (e.g. not making the workplace accessible)
- failing to appropriately address (actual or alleged) issues (e.g. underperformance, misconduct, or inappropriate or harmful behaviour such as bullying), or
- decision-making processes that are poor or which workers aren't told about.

Traumatic events or material

Witnessing, investigating or being exposed to traumatic events or materials is a psychosocial hazard.

Something is more likely to be traumatic when it is unexpected, seems uncontrollable or is caused by intentional cruelty. Traumatic events or materials become a hazard when they are severe (e.g. very traumatic), prolonged (e.g. long term) or frequent (e.g. happens often).

Traumatic events or materials may include:

- witnessing or investigating a fatality, serious injury, abuse, neglect or other serious incident (e.g. working in child protection)
- being afraid or exposed to extreme risks <https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/glossary#risks> (e.g. being in a car accident)
- exposure to natural disasters (e.g. emergency service workers responding to a bushfire)
- supporting victims of painful and traumatic events (e.g. providing counselling)
- listening to or seeing traumatic materials (e.g. reading victim testimonies or an online moderator seeing evidence of a crime), or
- exposure to things that bring up traumatic memories.

Remote or isolated work

Remote or isolated work means work that is isolated from the assistance of others because of the location, time or nature of the work. It often involves long travel times, poor access to resources, or limited communications.

It is more than not getting mobile reception in the lift at the office. Remote or isolated work may include:

- working alone (e.g. cleaning an office afterhours)
- work where it is hard to get help in an emergency
- workplaces that take a long time to enter and exit (e.g. prisons or tower cranes) or a long time to get to (e.g. commuting to remote areas)
- having limited access to resources (e.g. infrequent deliveries and long delays for new supplies)
- reduced access to support networks or missing out on family commitments (e.g. working fly-in fly-out), or
- unreliable or limited communications and technology (e.g. workplaces with no phone reception or where IT systems often go offline).

Poor physical environment

A poor physical environment means workers are exposed to unpleasant, poor quality or hazardous working environments or conditions.

It is more than the office being a little chilly first thing on a cold morning. A poor physical environment becomes a psychosocial hazard when it is severe (e.g. very poor or hazardous), prolonged (e.g. poor long term) or frequent (e.g. often poor).

Poor physical environments may include:

- performing hazardous tasks (e.g. work at heights)
- working in hazardous conditions (e.g. near unsafe machinery or hazardous chemicals)
- doing demanding work while wearing uncomfortable personal protective equipment (PPE) or other equipment (e.g. PPE is poorly fitted, heavy, or reduces visibility or mobility)
- conditions that affect concentration (e.g. high noise levels, uncomfortable temperatures or poor lighting)
- unpleasant conditions such as poorly maintained amenities, unpleasant smells or loud music
- working with poorly maintained equipment (e.g. equipment that has become unsafe, noisy or started vibrating), and
- work-related accommodation that causes fatigue (e.g. conditions are noisy, uncomfortable or stop workers getting enough sleep).

Violence and aggression

Workplace violence and aggression is when a person is abused, threatened or assaulted at the workplace or while they are conducting University related activities.

It can cause both physical and psychological harm, making it a risk to health and safety.

Under the model WHS laws, persons conducting a business or undertaking (PCBUs) must manage the health and safety risks of workplace violence and aggression between workers and from other people at the workplace, like customers and clients.

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.

² Bullying is defined in Safe Work Australia Guidance and the *Fair Work Act 2009 (Commonwealth)*.

WHSMS Handbook - Element 3 Implementation - Chapter 3.15 – Appendix C Examples of Psychosocial Hazards

Approved by: Deputy Chief People Officer, Safety and Wellbeing

Version: 3.0

Release date: 28/07/2025

Review date: 28/07/2026

This process is uncontrolled after printing.

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.

Job insecurity

Job insecurity refers to employment where workers lack the assurance that their jobs will remain stable from day to day, week to week, or year to year.

Workers in these circumstances often find themselves in insecure, precarious and contingent work arrangements, such as fixed-term contracts, on-demand work, seasonal jobs, casual employment, freelance roles and gig work.

Examples of job insecurity may include:

- jobs where the length of employment is unclear, or employment is temporary
- jobs where there is little or no entitlements or benefits including paid leave
- jobs where there are low levels of control
- the need to work multiple jobs.

³ Legal definitions of 'sexual harassment' may vary in each state and territory.

Fatigue

Fatigue is more than feeling tired and drowsy. It is a state of physical, mental and/or emotional exhaustion that reduces a person's ability to perform work safely and effectively.

Fatigue may include:

- physical exhaustion due to work that involves high physical demands or poor environmental work conditions.
- mental exhaustion due to work that involves high mental or cognitive demands.
- emotional exhaustion due to work that work involves high emotional demands.

Intrusive surveillance

Intrusive surveillance refers to the use of unreasonable surveillance methods or tools used to monitor and collect information about workers at work, beyond the purposes of performance monitoring.

Examples of intrusive surveillance may include:

- unreasonable level of supervision/oversight.
- tracking when and how much a worker is working through methods such as keyboard activity trackers.
- monitoring emails, files and internet use.
- covert surveillance by webcams on work computers.
- tracking calls and movements made by the worker using CCTV and trackable devices.
- technology that allows the PCBU to remote access (without worker knowledge/permission) and take screenshots of a workers' computer.
- GPS monitoring of workers' movement in company vehicles for the purpose of work performance monitoring, as opposed to other reasons such as safety considerations.

Family and domestic violence at work

Family and domestic violence (FDV) can become a work health and safety issue if the perpetrator makes threats, intimidates or carries out violence on a partner or family member at the workplace, including if a worker is working from home.

A 'worker' is anyone who carries out work in any capacity for your business or undertaking, including employees, contractors, subcontractors, outworkers, apprentices, trainees, work experience students and volunteers who carry out work.

A 'workplace' means a place where work is carried out for your business or undertaking and includes a place where a worker goes or is likely to be while at work. It includes workers' homes where workers have home-based work arrangements.