Psychological Health and Safety

Psychological Health and Safety Program - Assessing Psychosocial Hazards

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What is a psychologically healthy and safe workplace?

The CSA Standard Z1003-13 (R2018) "Psychological health and safety in the workplace - Prevention, promotion, and guidance to staged implementation" defines a psychologically healthy and safe workplace as a "workplace that promotes workers' psychological well-being and actively works to prevent harm to worker psychological health including in negligent, reckless, or intentional ways."

Psychological health is related to mental health, which is also defined in Z1003 as "a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community." This definition references the World Health Organization, who note that in this positive sense, mental health is the foundation of well-being and effective functioning for an individual and for a community.

Several organizational factors that describe workplace management practices, communication systems, and participation systems that can influence employees' mental health experience are outlined in the Z1003. These factors are known as psychosocial factors, and they are discussed in the OSH Answers document [Mental Health - Psychosocial Risk Factors in the Workplace](#). Using workplace psychosocial factors as a guide can help make an assessment strategy be more comprehensive and cover a wide range of management practices, priorities, and values that can affect mental health.

How do we assess psychological hazards?

Assessing the state of psychosocial factors in an organization can take many forms. Common psychological health and safety assessment methods include:

- Reviewing internal data such as complaint reports, absenteeism and turnover rates, and resource usage rates.

- Auditing existing structures related to mental health including policies and procedures, management practices, workplace supports, training programs, and job descriptions.

- Gathering feedback through conversations, observations, group discussions, anonymous forms, and surveys.

Most likely organizations will need to use more than one assessment method to understand where improvements can be made and how. For example, well-designed survey questions can be used to get a general idea of how all psychosocial factors are doing in the workplace, then follow up with several discussion groups to learn more details about the areas of concern.

Using a variety of assessment methods can also help prevent the potential for survey fatigue. Plan the assessment activities at a pace that is reasonable to the workforce to maintain strong engagement with psychological health and safety initiatives.

The assessment can include all the psychosocial factors or target one or a few of them at a time, as long as all factors are assessed on a regular basis.

What are examples of areas of concern?

The examples outlined below do not list all the possible items that can contribute to psychological health and safety. Review the psychosocial factors and adapt this checklist for your workplace's specific needs. Note that it is not the responsibility of the assessor or investigator to determine a diagnosis of another person's state of mental health. Team members can use surveys, or observational and conversational skills to note if there is an area of potential concern where further assessment may be necessary.

Sample Checklist for Psychological Hazards		
Area of concern	**Examples**	**Follow-up Suggested? (Yes/No)**
Pace of work	Discussion with or observation of employees who may mention work scheduling issues Workload (too much/too little), comments made such as "I never have time to take my breaks" or "I always work through lunch" or " I don't have enough work to do" Observing actions including rushing to complete tasks or taking shortcuts.	
Fatigue	Hours of work mentioned. Feeling or looking tired.	
Conflicting demands	Comments made such as "I don't know which item to work on first" or "I have so many priority projects, I don't know if I will get them all finished in time" Comments about little or no participation in decision making	
Hours of work	Working extra time (paid or unpaid) to complete work, including working through breaks or lunch, after or before scheduled hours, on days off, etc.	
Work environment	Issues that interrupt concentration are mentioned, as well as other hazards including ergonomic set up, indoor air quality, noise, etc.	
Working in conflict with others	Comments made such as "That person does not speak to me the same way as they do to others", "I have to be careful what I say" or "I don't feel I can raise that issue with that person"	
Working in social isolation	Comments made such as "I'd be the last person to know" or "I'm never told that" Comments about communication or function/dysfunction of the group	
Working alone	Concerns about communication methods, fear for safety	

Poor communication	Comments regarding not knowing about something, lack of feedback, no response, receiving only negative comments, etc.	
Relating to management, policies, organization of work, etc.	Comments that suggest inappropriate and unfair decisions around work policies and rules—for example approval (or no approval) regarding leaves or training requests Lack of opportunities for training or professional growth Comments regarding uncertainty about the individual's role	
Other:		

Why is it important to communicate findings and celebrate successes?

Share the overall findings of your assessments, while maintaining confidentiality regarding any individuals who were consulted during the process. Celebrating success gives everyone a milestone that will help connect their everyday actions to bigger shifts in the work environment, and encourage continued participation in psychological health and safety initiatives.

For example, the organization may

- Send a short email summarizing the appreciations and concerns heard during a discussion group to the participants and thank them for their participation
- Post a one-page summary of the main positive and negative findings of a survey on bulletin boards in common areas

When sharing assessment findings, it is important to communicate that all feedback received is valuable and will help to address issues that will create a more psychologically safe and healthy work environment.

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