

# Psychosocial hazards



**Make sure you know the risks to safety at work so you and your colleagues remain safe.**

**Psychosocial hazards are aspects of work that may cause a stress response which, in turn, can lead to psychological or physical harm.**

Key psychosocial hazards for nurses and midwives include:



**Role overload**  
(high workloads, inadequate staffing)



**Exposure to traumatic events**



**Conflict / poor workplace relationships**



**Poor support from supervisors and managers**



**Workplace violence**



**Bullying**



**Harassment including sexual harassment**



**Isolated work**



**Poor procedural justice**



**Poor organisational change**

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Authorised by S. Candish, General Secretary, NSWNMA | September 2022 | 1



## How is it a risk to health and safety?

A single or irregular exposure to psychosocial hazards may not create a psychosocial risk or the risk may be very low. However, if your exposure to a hazard (or a combination of these hazards) is frequent, prolonged or severe it can cause psychological and physical harm.

Some psychosocial risks are so serious that a single exposure may cause harm (e.g. exposure to violence).

## What can be done to manage psychosocial hazards?

Your employer has an obligation to ensure your safety at work. This includes doing everything reasonably practicable to make sure you are not exposed to psychosocial hazards at work.

The law in this area has improved in the last few years and NSW now has a WHS Regulation on psychosocial hazards that employers must follow and a Code of Practice for Managing Psychosocial Hazards at Work<sup>1</sup>.

Your employer must consult you and your health and safety representatives (if any) when deciding how to manage psychosocial hazards.

Your employer should take the following steps:

### 1. IDENTIFY THE HAZARD

Your employer has a legal obligation to identify psychosocial hazards in your workplace.

Sources where psychosocial hazards can be identified include:

- through consultation with staff and their representatives
- psychosocial risk assessment tools, such as *People at Work*
- review of employee survey results

- review of workloads, shift arrangements, rosters, records of hours work and overtime
- absenteeism, turnover, exit interviews, sick leave data and workers' compensation claims
- work health and safety incidents and reports
- complaints and investigations into alleged harmful workplace behaviours

### 2. ASSESS THE RISK

Your employer must consider the likelihood of exposure to psychosocial hazards causing harm to staff as well as how severe that harm could be. *Do control measures exist and are they adequate?*

Particular consideration should be given to the risks arising from cumulative exposure to multiple psychosocial hazards.

### 3. CONTROL THE RISK

Your employer must do everything reasonably practicable to eliminate the risks associated with psychosocial hazards. These will look different according to the nature of the hazards that are identified and what suits your workplace, but may include things like:

- having nurse to patient ratios to minimise work overload
- limits on caseload numbers for community health workers
- risk management plans with suitable controls for violence from high risk patients
- proper duress arrangements
- fair systems for managing allegations of misconduct or performance issues

### 4. REVIEW

Your employer must review the controls that have been put in place to manage psychosocial hazards to make sure they are effective. You should be consulted as part of this review.

## What can I do if I believe that psychosocial hazards are causing risks to my health and safety at work?



**1. Raise your concerns through the normal channels in your workplace.** Be sure to do this in writing. This may include things like putting in an incident report (or reporting a near miss) in your incident reporting system and sending an email to your manager.



**2. Talk to your Health and Safety representative** (if you have one) about your concerns



**3. If the issue remains unresolved, contact the NSWNMA for more advice and assistance** on 1300 367 962 or [gensec@nswnma.asn.au](mailto:gensec@nswnma.asn.au)

For more information on managing psychosocial hazards including controls please see the Code of Practice Managing Psychosocial Hazards at Work.

<sup>1</sup> Health care case studies in the appendix (case study 1 and 7) [www.safework.nsw.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0004/983353/Code-of-Practice\\_Managing-psychosocial-hazards.pdf](http://www.safework.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0004/983353/Code-of-Practice_Managing-psychosocial-hazards.pdf)

