



Australian Government

Comcare

Psychological Injury and Management

Prevention and Rehabilitation Branch

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Psychological Injury

- Stress is a part of life
- If stress is intense and goes on for some time, it can lead to mental and physical ill health
- The form of injury generally associated with work-related stress is called psychological injury.

Psychological Injury Cost

- Psychological injuries can typically account for 7% of total workers' compensation claims, but nearly 27% of total claim costs.
- Each claim can be 5 times more expensive than average claims

Employer responsibilities

- Employers must take all reasonably practicable steps to protect the health and safety (physical and psychological) of their employees at work. *Occupational Health and Safety Act 1991*
- Risk Management involves establishment of appropriate framework and culture for health and safety within an organisation. *Occupational Health and Safety Code of Practice 2008.*
- “psychosocial environment- this includes workplace stressors, which arise from a variety or combination of sources, and includes, but is not limited to bullying and harassment”
Responsibility of employers to identify hazards 1.17 f)

Psychological Injury Risks

Work context:

- management styles
- interpersonal relationships
- risk of violence
- work roles
- career concerns
- organisational change

Psychological Injury Risks

Work content

- heavy workload and fast working pace
- physically monotonous and repetitive work
- environmental issues.

Warning Signs

- rate of unplanned absences
- accident and injury records
- levels of conflict in the workplace
- decline in performance
- dissatisfaction expressed through surveys
- (workers' compensation claims)

What can be done?

PREVENTION

address the workplace factors that are risks for psychological injury

EARLY INTERVENTION

reduce the severity of the consequences of stress before they become more serious by responding to signs of stress and intervening early

REHABILITATION

treatment and rehabilitation aimed at restoration of health and functioning and RTW.

Prevention- address workplace hazards

- Promote safe and supportive workplaces
- Identify the sources of potential harm to employee health and wellbeing
- Systematically assess the risks arising from these hazards
- In consultation with employees, develop and implement a plan to address the workplace factors that are risks of psychological injury
- Monitor and review the implementation and effectiveness of interventions and aim for continuous improvement

Early Intervention - provide early support and assistance

- Respond early to provide assistance and support for employees before warning signs develop into an injury
- Provide managers with information so they can recognise early warning signs of employee distress and low morale
- Ensure employees are aware of support and assistance that is available to them, such as Employee Assistance Programs
- Ensure managers know how to access and utilise support and assistance that Human Resources areas may provide, particularly in relation to managing employees at risk
- Use organisational health data to proactively identify and respond to hot spots.

Rehabilitation – provide safe and effective return to work of injured employees

- Stay in touch with employees who are away from work & provide the necessary support to facilitate a return to work
- Manage risks of poor rehabilitation outcomes
- Return to work outcomes are improved if:
 - employee perceives that their work is valued
 - management is committed to the return to work effort (such as finding suitable duties)
 - peer support on return to the work group

Bullying - a cause of mental stress

- Repeated, unreasonable behaviour directed towards a person or groups of persons at a workplace
- Constitutes a risk to the health, safety and wellbeing of individuals and can lead to serious psychological injury and other illness
- Manage as a workplace hazard using risk assessment and control processes that other workplace hazards are subject to
- Draft employer guidance available & currently under Scheme consultation

Overview

- Organisational costs of mental stress and psychological injuries
- Employer responsibilities to manage the causes of mental stress as an OHS risk
- Importance of an organisational approach with prevention being the main focus but effective systems to respond early to support individuals at risk
- Further explore aspects of effective rehabilitation and return to work in the upcoming Rehabilitation Management session