THE OPUS CENTRE
FOR PSYCHOSOCIAL RISK

It's Not 'Just Part of the Job':

Managing Psychosocial Risk in Today's Libraries?

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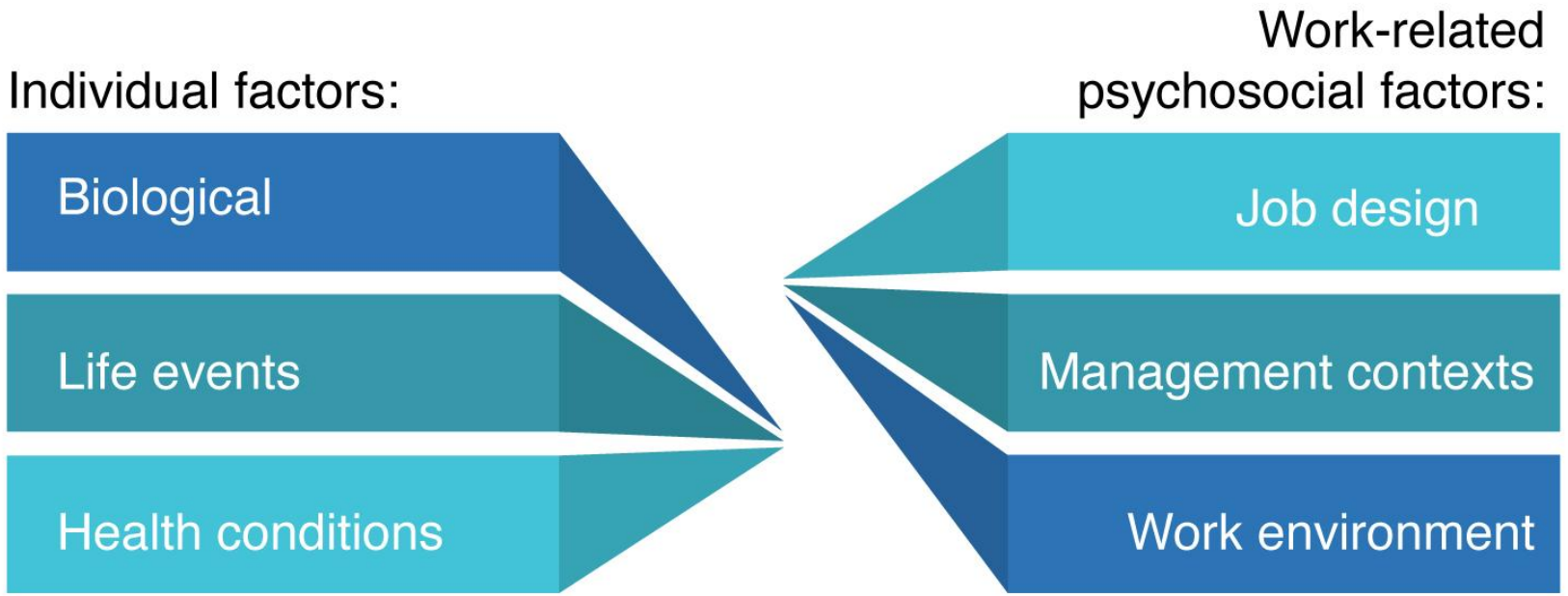
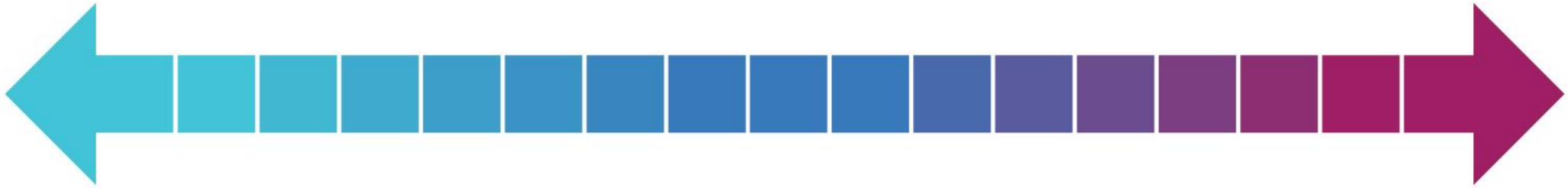
Creating a climate for psychosocial safety

A psychosocially safe work environment will have ***systems*** for protecting worker ***mental health*** being impacted by:



Mental Health Continuum



Mental Health

- Positive connections each day
- Maintain a positive mindset
- Maintain a healthy lifestyle
- Engage in hobbies or social
- Quality recovery
- Consistent sleep
- Look out for potential stressors
- Regulate emotions

Struggling

- Maintain a healthy lifestyle
- Identify stressors as they arise
- Engage in healthy coping strategies
- Implement self-care strategies
- Talk with trusted people
- See a health professional
- Seek supports instead of withdrawing

Mental Ill Health

- Maintain a healthy lifestyle
- Talk with trusted people
- Engage with appropriate supports
- Follow health professional recommendations
- If safe, share with your organisation for support

Psychological vs Psychosocial Safety

🗣️ PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

How people experience work

- Speak up
- Ask questions
- Admit mistakes
- Seek help
- Share ideas

🏢 PSYCHOSOCIAL SAFETY

How work is designed

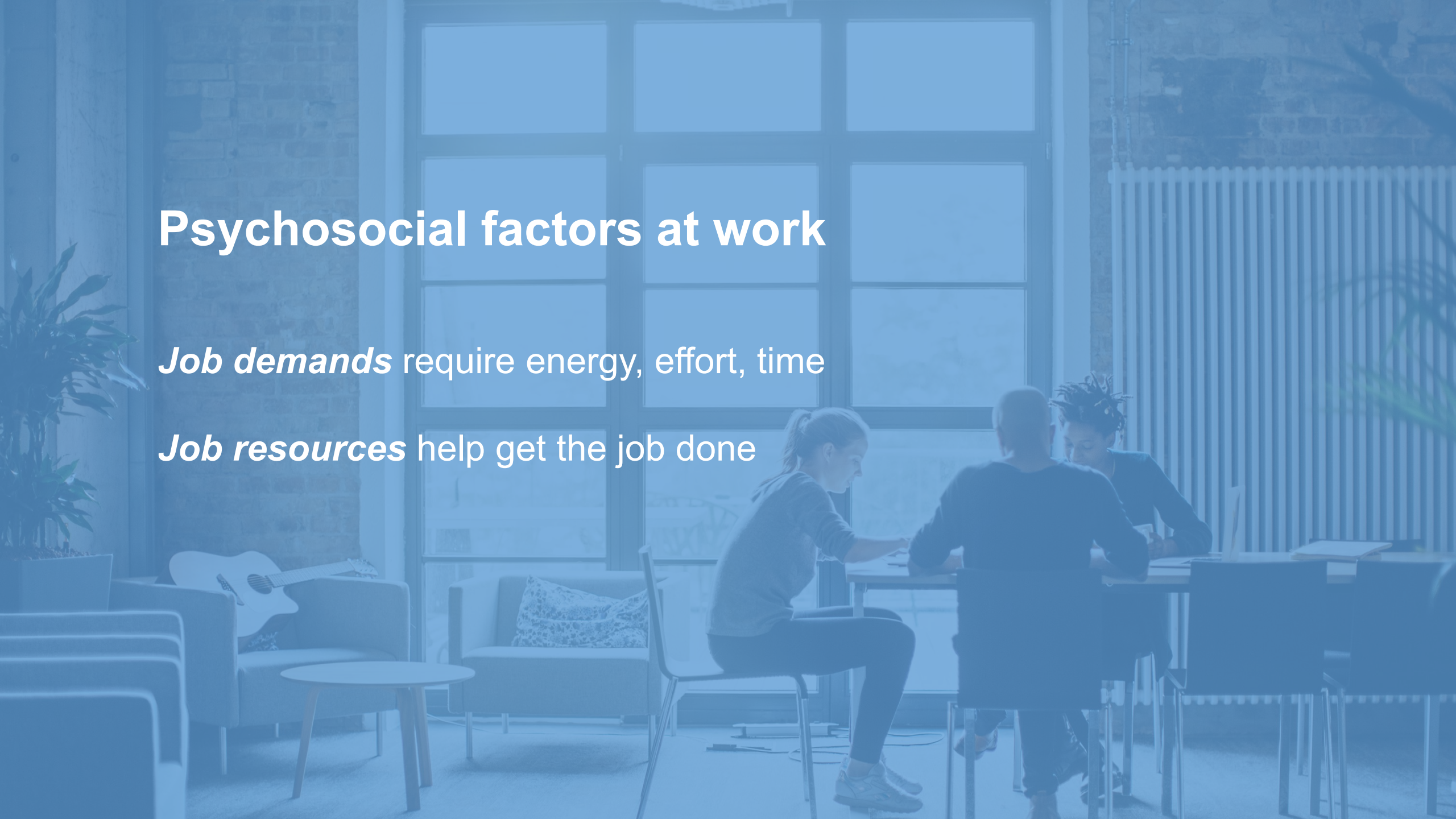
- Safe systems
- Manage risks
- Clear roles
- Reasonable workload
- Supportive leadership

Psychosocial factors at work

Psychological + Social = Psychosocial
Also called work-related factors

Includes ***job design***, ***social***, ***organisational*** and ***management*** contexts of work that have the potential to impact worker health and wellbeing.

Cox & Griffiths, 2005



Psychosocial factors at work

Job demands require energy, effort, time

Job resources help get the job done

Job demands – Task related

Mental Demands

Calculations
Time pressures
Planning
Scheduling

Emotional Demands

Heightened emotional situations
Interpreting others' intentions
Regulating your emotions
Being mindful of your actions

Job demands – Work environment

Organisational change

Restructuring

Downsizing

New policies

New procedures

Frequent management turnover

Poor Interpersonal Relationships

Harassment

Discomfort due to humour

Unfair treatment due to gender

Negative comments about race

Sworn or yelled at

Humiliated in front of others

Unwanted sexual advance

Physically assaulted

Bullying

Offensive behaviour

Repeated over time

Intentional or unintentional

Creates risk to health

Work-family conflict

Remote or isolated work

Shift work or irregular hours

Recovery between shifts

Recovery between tasks

Ability to invest in positive connections outside of work

Job demands – Occupation and Industry Specific

Client & Customer Aggression

Exposure to Traumatic Events or Materials

Isolated, Remote or Hybrid Work

Privacy & Surveillance

Shift Work & Fatigue Management

Hazardous Physical Environment

Job Resources & Support

Job Control

Skill Discretion

- Use of skill
- Learn new things
- Repetitive work
- Creativity

Decision Authority

- Make decisions on my own
- Freedom how I do my work
- Influence what happens in my job

Job Resources

Rewards

- Financial (e.g., job security)
- Appreciation & Recognition
- Professional Development

Procedural Justice

- Fairness in implementation

Recovery

- Regain strength in between work demands
- Fatigued between work periods

Job Support

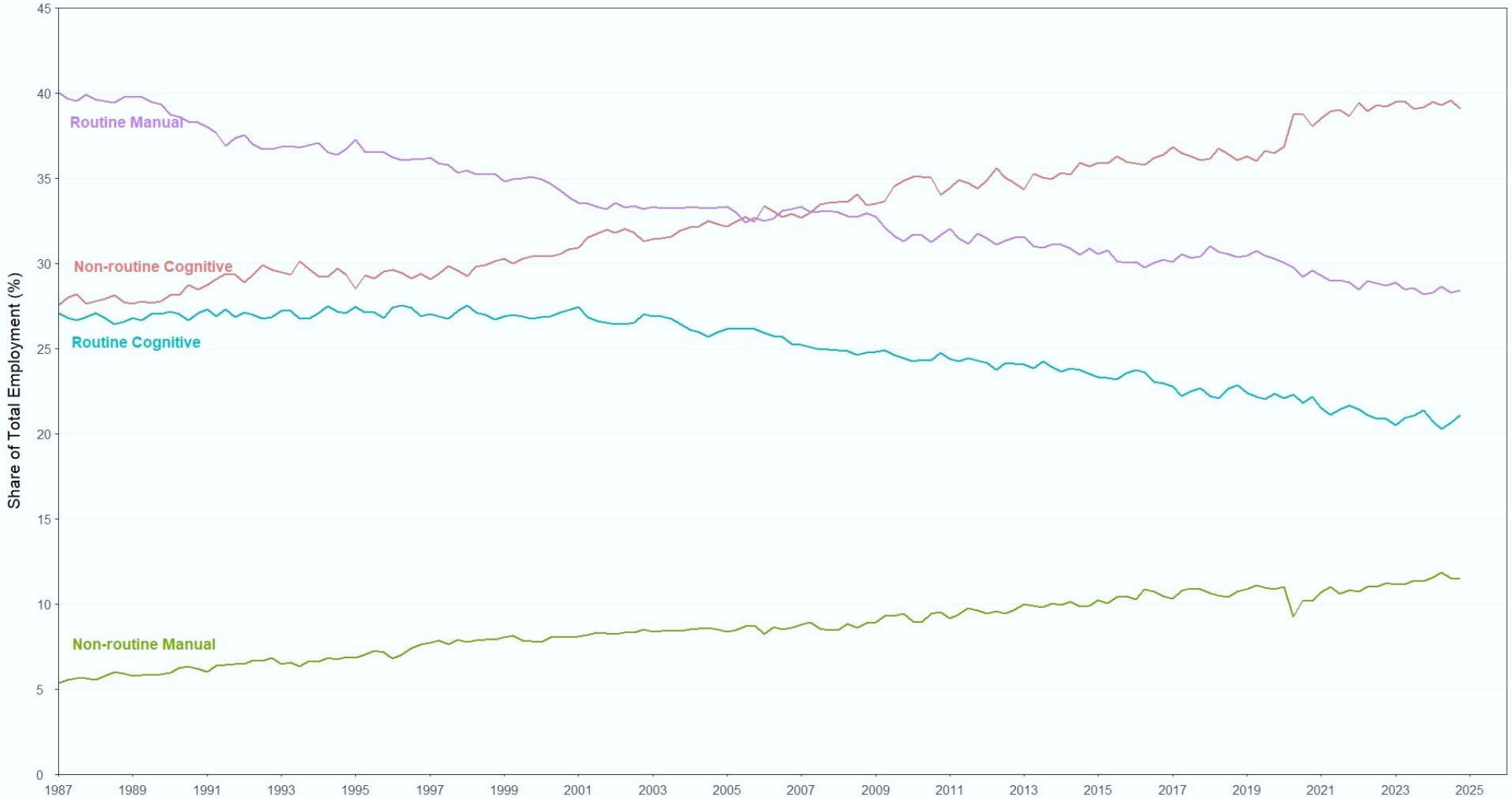
Supervisor Support

- Direct manager support
- Mentoring
- Role clarity
- Listening to feedback
- Matching Resources

Co-Worker Support

- Providing assistance
- Coaching
- Debriefing

Main type of skill required from Australian working population 1987 to 2025



Original classifications of work derived from The Future of Work in Australia: Anticipating how new technologies will reshape labour markets, occupations and skill requirement (Healy, Nicholson, Gahan, 2017).

Data sourced from Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2024). Labour Force, Australia, Detailed, Quarterly, November 2024, Time series spreadsheets, 'Table 07: Employed persons by occupation major group of main job (ANZSCO) and sex, Catalogue no. 6291.0.55.001, Canberra.

https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/labour-force-australia-detailed/latest-release.

Stress at Work

Not all demands at work result in stress.

A ***sense of challenge*** in an environment where workers ***feel supported*** and have ***adequate access to resources*** can be energising, providing employees with motivation to learn and grow.

(Sauter et al., 1999).

Stress at Work

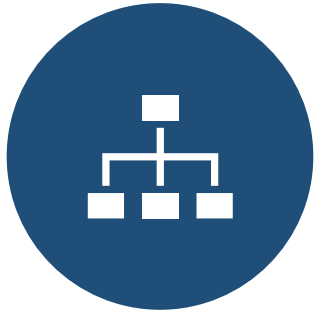
Harmful ***physical*** and ***psychological responses*** that occur when the ***requirements*** of the job ***do not match*** the ***capabilities, resources, or needs*** of the worker, which can lead to ***poor health, illness, or injury.***

(Sauter et al., 1999)

Common Psychosocial Hazards

Work design factors that impact psychological health

EXCESSIVE OR UNREASONABLE OR INAPPROPRIATE JOB DEMANDS



POORLY MANAGED ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE

INCIVILITY, BULLYING & HARASSMENT

LACK OF SUFFICIENT RESOURCES & SUPPORT

What factors are most likely to cause harm to worker health in your organisation?

- Work-life imbalance
- Remote or isolated work
- Lack of supervisor support
- Inadequate reward & recognition
- Inadequate recovery
- High mental demands
- Excessive emotional demands
- Client or customer aggression
- Bullying & harassment
- Poor change management

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Queensland Evidence

Working for Queensland 2020 - State Library of Queensland 2020 (N = 306, 94% response rate):

- 41% overloaded, 28% burned out, 20% said work harmed their health.
- 6% reported bullying in the past year; 10% witnessed it.

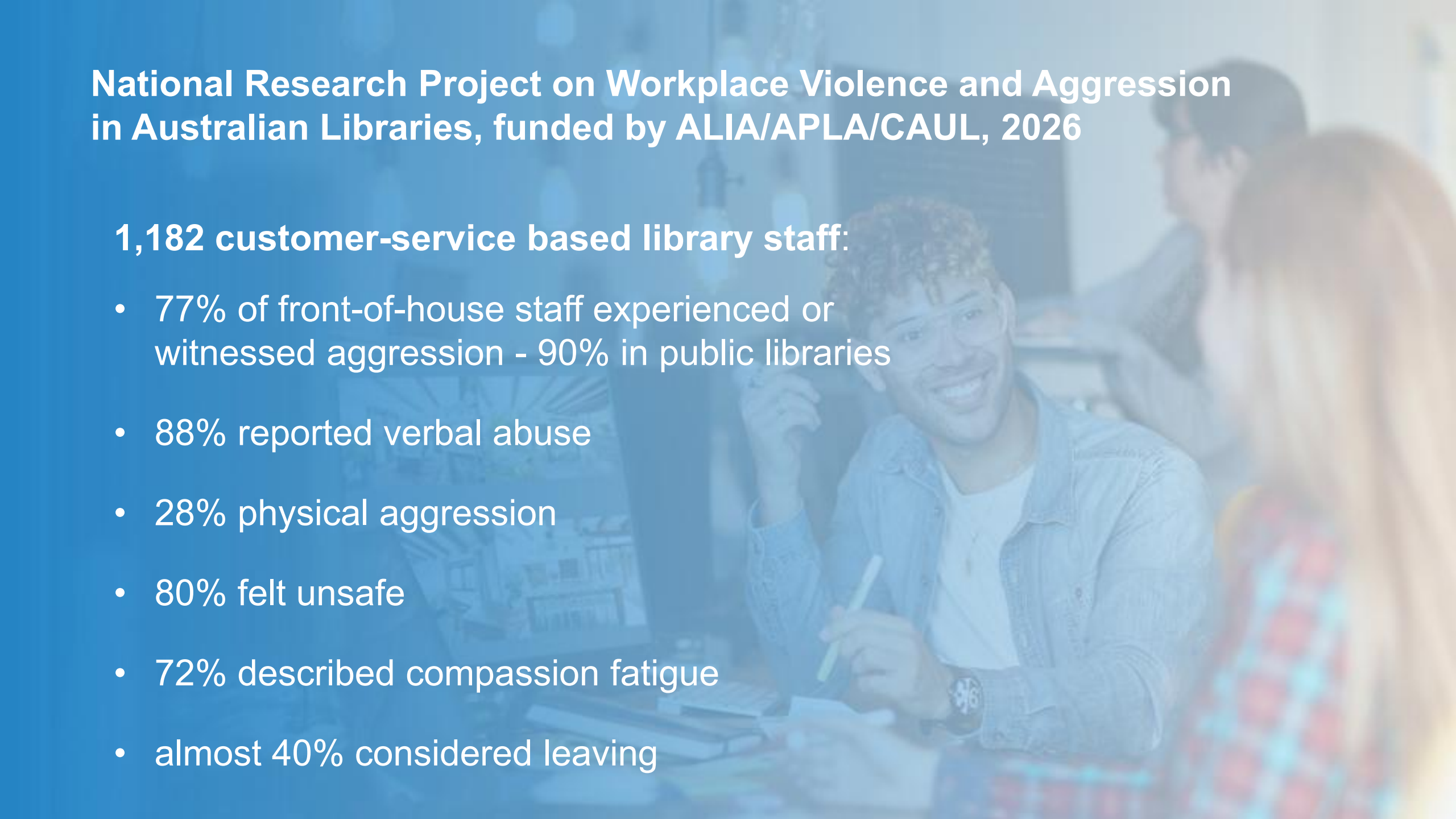
Working for Queensland 2024 - Queensland public sector 2024:

- 10% faced violence or aggression, mostly from clients and the public.

National Research Project on Workplace Violence and Aggression in Australian Libraries, funded by ALIA/APLA/CAUL, 2026

1,182 customer-service based library staff:

- 77% of front-of-house staff experienced or witnessed aggression - 90% in public libraries
- 88% reported verbal abuse
- 28% physical aggression
- 80% felt unsafe
- 72% described compassion fatigue
- almost 40% considered leaving



2026 Australian Worker Exposure Survey Analytical Report, Safe Work Australia

National sample of 10,000 workers aged 15+

- 67% report demanding emotional work
- 43.6% inadequate support
- 12.3% work completely alone
- 42.2% struggle to get help
- Serious claims for occupational violence rose 56% over five years

Common Signs for Symptoms in the Workplace

Cognitive Signs

Cognitive signs include brain fog, forgetfulness, slower decision-making, and increased mistakes influenced by chronic stress in knowledge work.

Emotional Signs

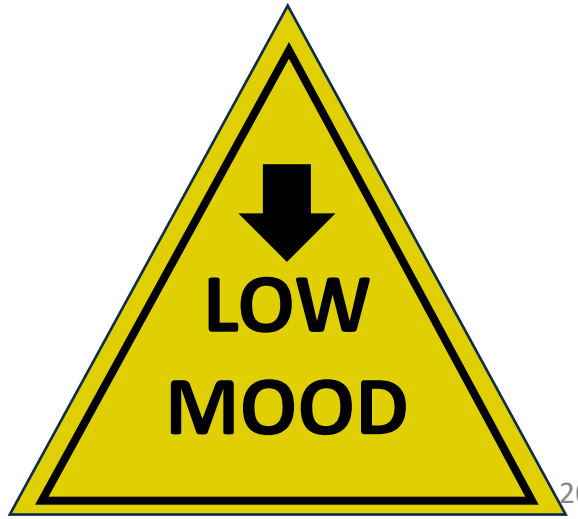
Emotional signs such as irritability, anxiety, low mood, and disproportionate reactions reflect depleted emotion regulation under stress.

Behavioural Signs

Behavioural signs include withdrawal, missed deadlines, overworking, and conflict escalation, indicating stress impact on work habits.

Physical Signs

Physical signs like fatigue, headaches, sleep disruption, and reduced energy signal the body's response to prolonged stress.



Supporting worker wellbeing

- Build relationships on a regular basis
- Educate employees about mental health
- Speak openly about mental health
- Promote good health and wellbeing
- Build leader capability and confidence to support worker mental health
- Make staff aware of health and safety systems and supports
- Proactively manage psychosocial risk
- Approach those you are concerned about
- Arrange suitable duties when appropriate

Supporting workers with a mental health condition

- Regularly consult with your staff member
- Adjust tasks if reasonable
- Allow for changes in work times if practical
- Provide leave for treatment
- Consult with their treater if appropriate
- Reduce/Change workload where possible
- Develop and review a return to work plan
- Communicate to the team (taking into account the privacy of individuals)

Further Assistance

What types of emotional demands are in your workplace?

- Bullying & harassment
- Inappropriate workplace behaviour
- Occupational violence
- Client/customer aggression
- Exposure to trauma
- Vicarious and/or secondary trauma
- Compassion fatigue
- Moral injury
- Empathy distress
- Interpersonal interactions

Prevalence of Workplace Microaggressions and Racial Discrimination (Nader Salari et al, 2024)

Meta-analysis 3,000 workers from US and Norway

- 74% report experiencing workplace microaggressions
- Comments on language proficiency or mispronunciation of names
- Impacts physical and mental health, productivity, and culture
- Implicit biases, perpetrators may not realise the damage caused

Appropriate Workplace Behaviour

Bullying

Offensive behaviour

Directed at individual or group

Repeated over time

Intentional or unintentional

Creates risk to health

Harassment

Discomfort due to humour

Unfair treatment due to gender

Negative comments about race

Sworn or yelled at

Humiliated in front of others

Unwanted sexual advance

Physically assaulted

Micro-aggressions

Subtle or unintentional

Slights or insults

Directed at individuals

Verbal or nonverbal

Implicit biases

Perpetrators may not be aware of action or potential for harm

Interpersonal interactions

Social exchanges

Formal and informal

Colleagues, managers, clients, stakeholders

Communication

Collaboration

Conflict resolution

Occupational violence and traumatic events

Occupational Violence

Acts or threats of physical violence

Harassment or intimidation

Verbal abuse

Physical assaults

Exposure to Traumatic Events or Materials

Witnessing or investigating serious incidents

Supporting victims of trauma

Viewing or handling distressing content

Being involved in or hearing about traumatic situations

Vicarious & Secondary Trauma

	VICARIOUS TRAUMA	SECONDARY TRAUMA
Definition	A cumulative, long-term transformation in a helper's inner experience due to empathic engagement with trauma survivors.	Acute emotional distress resulting from hearing about another's traumatic experience.
Mechanism	Develops gradually through repeated exposure to trauma narratives.	Can occur suddenly after a single exposure to traumatic material.
Symptoms	Shifts in worldview, loss of meaning, altered beliefs about safety, trust, and control.	PTSD-like symptoms: intrusive thoughts, hyperarousal, avoidance.
Duration	Often chronic and insidious.	Often acute and may resolve with time or support.
Context	Common in long-term caregiving or therapeutic roles.	Can affect anyone exposed to trauma second-hand, including one-time exposures.

Empathy is the ability to understand the person's ***situation***, ***perspective***, and ***feelings*** and to communicate that ***understanding*** back to them

Cognitive empathy is being sensitive to a person in a rational way

Affective empathy is being sensitive to a person in an emotional way

Empathy's Dual Nature

Empathetic Concern

Compassion while observing distress
Promotes helping behaviors
Take steps to support person

Empathetic Distress

Aversive response to distress
Self-oriented rather than the other person
Desire to withdraw oneself from a situation

Compassion Fatigue vs Compassion Satisfaction

Compassion satisfaction is a feeling of emotional accomplishment and reward for helping others

Compassion fatigue is emotional, physical, and psychological exhaustion resulting from exposure to others' suffering leading to symptoms such as:

- Emotional numbness or detachment
- Sleep disturbances
- Anxiety or irritability
- Reduced empathy or compassion
- Feelings of hopelessness or helplessness
- Physical symptoms e.g., headaches or stomach issues

Moral Injury

Psychological and emotional ***distress*** due to ***perpetuating***, ***witnessing***, or failing to ***prevent*** a situation that ***violates*** their deeply held ***moral*** beliefs or ***ethical*** codes.

Key features:

- Persistent guilt, shame, or self-condemnation
- Loss of trust in others, leaders or institutions
- Emotional numbness or detachment
- Depression, anxiety, or suicidal ideation

Which emotional demands are contributing the most risk to health in your workplace?

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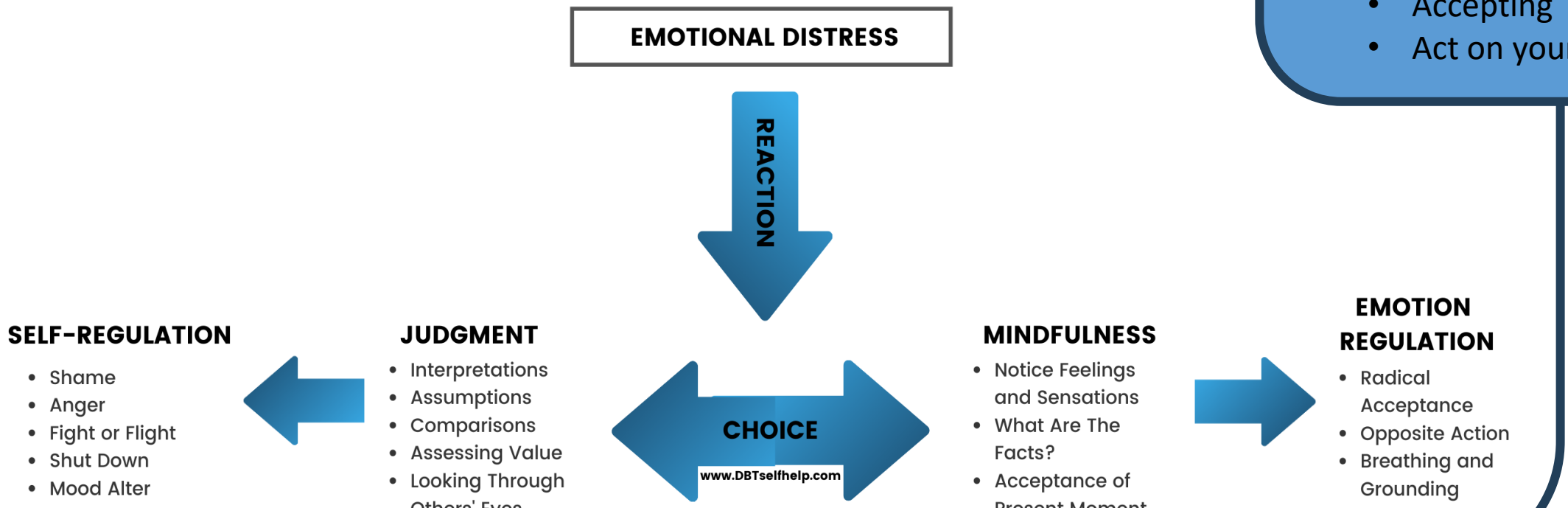
what can you do?

Emotional Agility & Emotional Regulation

Key Strategies

- Invest in positive connections
- Be aware of emotions as they arise
- Appraise and reframe
- Accepting
- Act on your values

Response Options to Emotional Distress



https://dbtselfhelp.com/dbt-skills-list/emotion-regulation/

Boundaries

Establish ***limits*** on how much of your ***time, energy***, and ***emotional*** resources you are willing to share.

Protecting your emotional ***well-being*** and ensuring that your ***needs*** are ***respected***.

Prevents feeling ***overwhelmed***, ***depleted***, and ***burnt*** out by the emotional ***demands*** of others.

Foster mutual ***respect*** and ***understanding***, leads to more ***balanced*** and fulfilling ***relationships***.

Allows you to ***prioritise*** your own ***needs*** and ***engage*** in activities that ***replenish*** your emotional ***resources***.

Builds ***self efficacy*** to advocate for yourself and assert your ***needs*** without feeling ***guilty*** or ***afraid*** of ***rejection***.

SOURCE

1. Identify Your Limits
Reflect on what makes you feel drained, resentful, or overwhelmed.

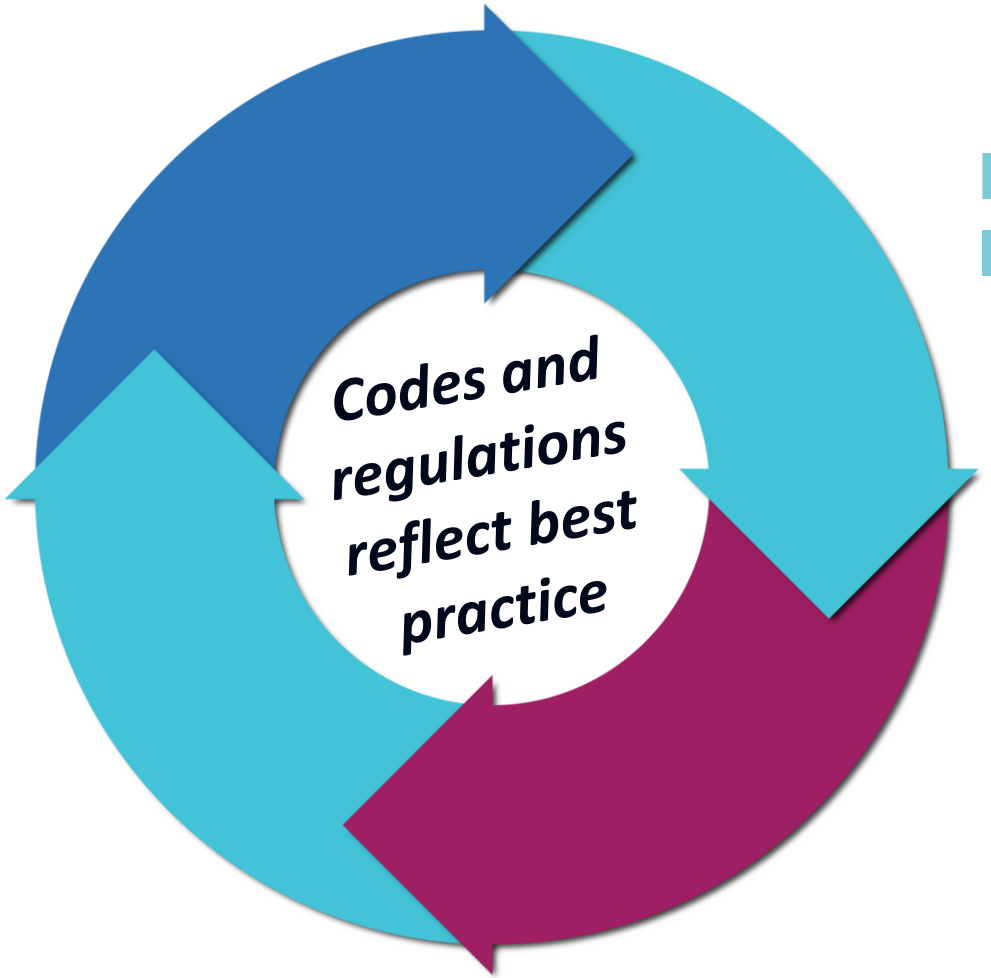
2. Communicate Clearly
Use “I” statements (e.g., “I need time to recharge after meetings”) and avoid over-explaining.

3. Set Consequences
Let others know what will happen if boundaries are crossed (stepping away from a conversation)

4. Practice Consistency
Reinforce your boundaries through action, not just words.

5. Seek Support
Use peer debriefing, coaching, or EAP services when boundaries are challenged.

Best Practice Psychosocial Risk Management



Psychosocial safety indicators for worker health

Lead Indicator

Shared employee perceptions of policy and practice to protect worker mental health.

Predict psychosocial factors, worker health and productivity.

Psychosocial Factor

Psychosocial factors occur as an outcome of policy, practice and procedure.

Interactions between factors predict worker health and productivity.

Lag Indicator for Health

Lag indicators show recent status of health and productivity as an outcome of policy, practice and procedure.

Determine Level of Risk

Consultation (Small, Medium, Teams in Large Enterprises):

- One on one conversations
- Team meetings
- Leader meetings
- Toolbox talks

Other sources:

- Demographic data
- Sickness absence
- Incident & injury data

Observation (Medium, Large Enterprises):

- Psychosocial risk audit tool
- WHS agenda item, hazard register, or risk matrix

Survey Data (Medium, Large Enterprises):

- Employee engagement and wellbeing survey
- Psychosocial risk assessment survey tool

Key personnel

- Executive/General Manager
- WHS representative
- HR representative
- Supervisor
- HSR/Union representative
- Wellbeing champions

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Psychosocial Safety Hierarchy of Control

Can be used for a ***specific*** factor or for ***general*** psychological health and safety

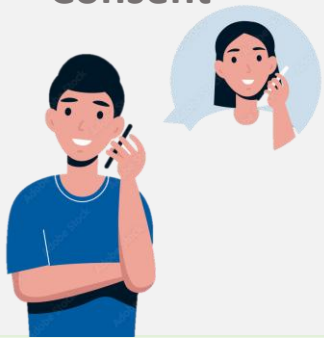
(Bailey & Dollard, 2014)

Managing Emotional Demands

Identify Potential Sources of High Emotional Demand

Provide Recovery from Emotional Demands

EAP Proactively Contacting Staff With Consent



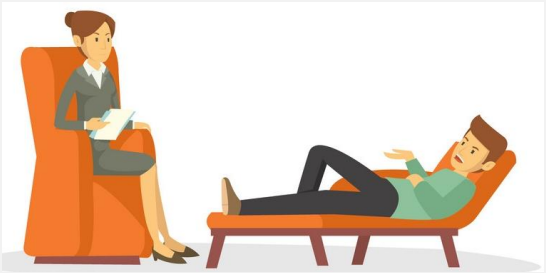
Be Transparent with Workers about Controls for Emotional Demands

Consult with Workers to Improve Controls

Set clear expectations for Emotionally Demanding Interactions

On-Site EAP Regularly Visiting Work Groups with Excessive Emotional Demands

Provide Opportunities for Workers to De-Brief

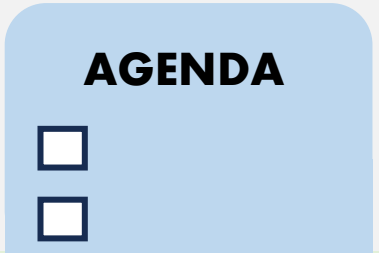


Managing Workload

STOP PAUSE GO

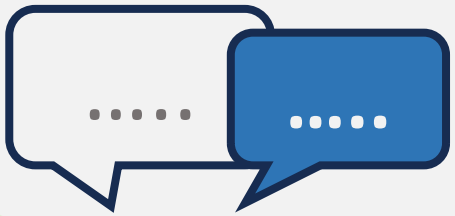
Create Boundaries for your work

Workload on the Agenda



Strategic Pause to Reassess Workload

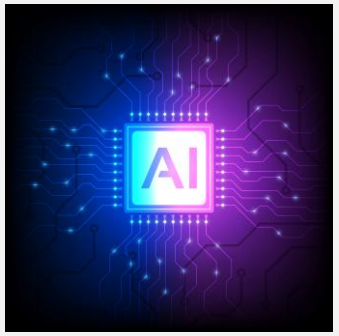
Clear Expectations around Workload



Co-Design of Workload

Creating a Third Space

Identify Efficiencies

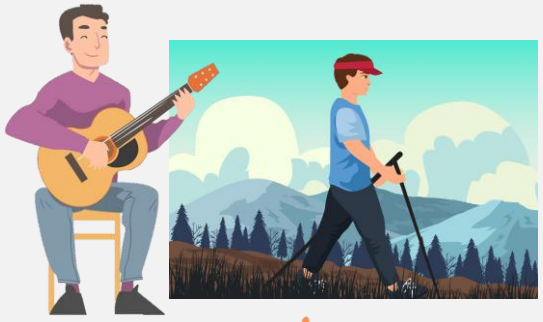


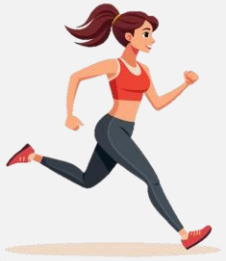
Admin Assassins

Match appropriate resources to manage demands

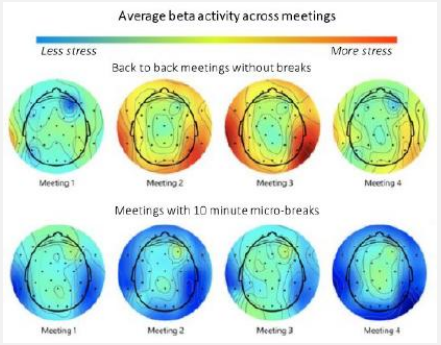
Prioritising Recovery

Reflect on what gives you energy





Micro Breaks and Proactive Recovery



Seek Support From Trusted people

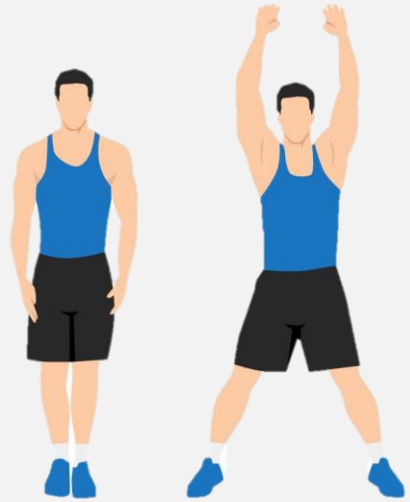
Practice Mindfulness in Quiet Zones

Regular Check Ups

Lay on your Back for 5 mins

Right to Disconnect

Star Jumps OR Jumping Jacks



Conclusion

Everyone has ***different*** capacities for ***managing*** emotional demands.

Emotional demands in the workplace can lead to emotional ***distress*** and ***exhaustion***.

Emotional ***fatigue*** impacts ***mental health*** and organisational ***productivity***.

Individuals and ***teams*** need to determine systems to enhance ***psychosocial safety***.

Regular ***risk assessments*** help in ***identifying*** and ***mitigating*** psychosocial harm.

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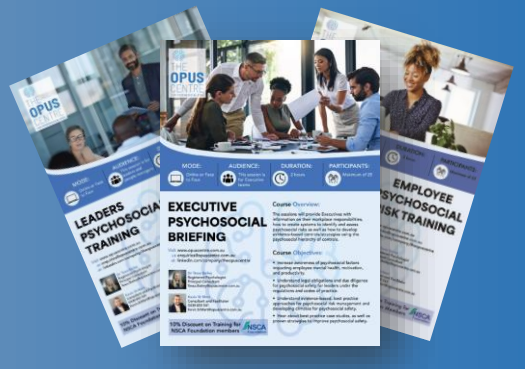
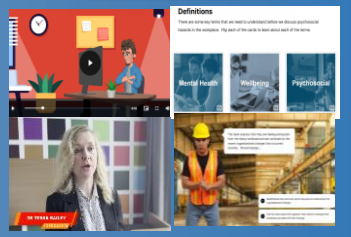
Services

Executive, Leader and Employee Training



Psychosocial Awareness E-Learning Modules



Psychosocial Risk Management Certification Training

EmpowerED
Certification Network Mentoring

Psychosocial Risk Assessment

Consultancy & Research

www.opuscentre.com.au

Q&A

FOR A COPY OF TODAY'S PRESENTATION

"Workplaces with a positive approach to psychological health and safety are better able to recruit and retain talent, have improved employee engagement, enhanced productivity, are more creative and innovative, and have higher profit levels.

Other positive impacts include a reduction of several key workplace issues including the risk of conflict, grievances, turnover, disability, injury rates, absenteeism and performance or morale issues"
(BNQ/CSA Group/MHCC, 2013).