

PSYCHOSOCIAL HAZARDS

in NZ Construction

Understanding risks and practical
project responses



BE ALIGNED TARANAKI



UNDERSTANDING PSYCHOSOCIAL HAZARDS

Construction workplace
and safety distinctions

PSYCHOSOCIAL HAZARDS IN CONSTRUCTION

What they are

Psychosocial hazards are features of work design, management, and social context that can cause psychological or physical harm through stress responses.

Why construction is high-risk

Complex sites, tight deadlines, hazardous tasks, and layered contracting can create high workload, long or irregular hours, unclear roles, conflict, job insecurity, and poor leadership.

Impacts and the NZ context

Frequent or severe stress can reduce concentration and decisionmaking, increasing fatigue, burnout, anxiety, and incident risk. In New Zealand, concern is rising due to mental health, workforce sustainability, and suicide rates

Build psychological safety and keep engaging

Normalise wellbeing conversations and ensure access to EAP/peer support. Use check-ins, surveys, and workshops; share outcomes and show feedback leads to action to build trust

PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

Vs

PSYCHOSOCIAL SAFETY

Psychological safety (TEAM CLIMATE)

- ▶ People feel safe to speak up, ask questions, raise concerns, and admit mistakes without fear of embarrassment or punishment.
- ▶ Critical on sites where reporting risks and uncertainties prevents incidents and rework.

Psychosocial safety (WORK DESIGN)

- ▶ Systems and leadership practices that shape wellbeing: workload, role clarity, support, autonomy, fairness, and resourcing.
- ▶ Strong risk management supports better performance and aligns with NZ Health and Safety at Work expectations.



WHY PSYCHOSOCIAL HAZARDS MATTER

THE STRESS PATHWAY IMPACTS

1

Hazards trigger stress response

Ongoing workload, time pressure, conflict, or low control activates stress. Short-term alertness can help, but frequent or prolonged stress becomes harmful.

2

Cognitive, psychological, physical harm

Chronic stress undermines concentration, memory, emotional regulation, and decisions; it can drive anxiety, burnout, and depression, while increasing fatigue and injury risk.

3

Project delivery impacts

Higher absence, disengagement, errors, rework, conflict, and productivity loss. Managing psychosocial hazards at the source supports safer, more reliable NZ construction delivery.

WHAT'S AT RISK IF HAZARDS AREN'T MANAGED?



Individuals: health and wellbeing

Anxiety, burnout, depression, and physical strain reduce quality of life and the ability to work safely.



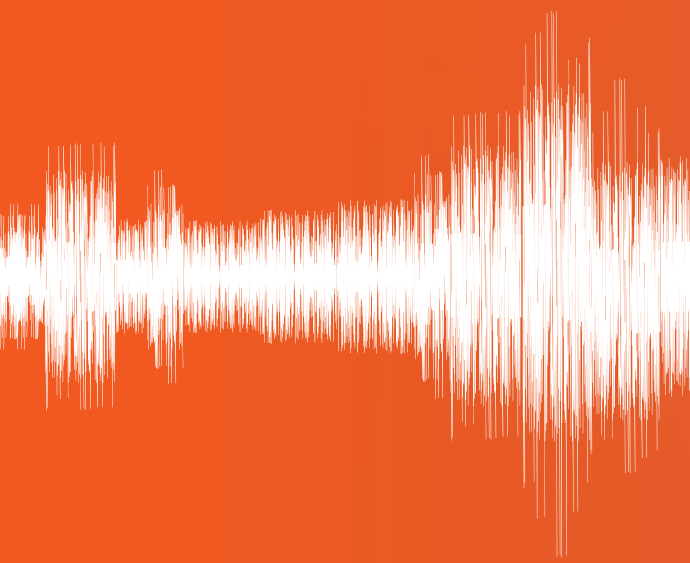
Safety and teams: errors and breakdowns

Stress weakens hazard perception, focus, and decisions—raising incidents and near misses in high-risk construction work.

Engagement drops and communication frays, eroding collaboration and cohesion.

Delivery: performance and cost impacts

Turnover, absenteeism, and presenteeism reduce capability—driving delays, overruns, conflict, and quality risks.



PSYCHOSOCIAL RISK IN NZ CONSTRUCTION

Scale of distress

Around 30–40% report moderate–high psychological distress, and ~1 in 5 report symptoms consistent with depression.

Workload and project cycles

Anxiety can spike during critical milestones and recovery periods; long hours and work–life conflict are common, especially for leaders.

Culture and safety outcomes

Stigma can delay help-seeking; suicide risk has driven sector focus. For major projects, proactive psychosocial risk management protects capability, safety, and trust.

HSWA PSYCHOSOCIAL OBLIGATIONS

The background image shows a construction site at sunset. Several workers in hard hats are silhouetted against the bright orange and yellow sky. In the background, there are tall rebar structures and a power line tower. The overall scene is industrial and captures the end of a workday.

Same duty as physical hazards

HSWA 2015 recognises psychosocial hazards as workplace risks. PCBUs must identify hazards, assess risks, and implement effective controls so far as is reasonably practicable.

System design over resilience

Organisations can't rely only on wellbeing programmes if excessive workloads, unrealistic deadlines, or poor leadership remain. Controls must address upstream causes.

Due diligence and project governance

Officers must understand psychosocial risks and ensure resources and processes exist. Integrating HSWA into planning and leadership supports safer delivery and reduces legal and reputational risk.



IMPLEMENTING A STRUCTURED APPROACH ON PROJECTS

Identifying and Assessing Psychosocial
Hazards, Implementing Controls
and Supporting the Workforce

IDENTIFYING & ASSESSING PSYCHOSOCIAL HAZARDS

1

Identify hazards in work design

Look beyond individual behaviour to how work is planned, paced, and led. Common hazards include high workload, tight timeframes, long hours, role ambiguity, poor communication, and conflict exposure.

2

Use multiple inputs to find issues

Combine workforce surveys, workshops, toolbox talks, incident reviews, and direct engagement with teams to build a clear picture across roles and crews.

3

Assess risk and prioritise action

Consider severity, frequency/duration, and how many people are affected—plus what the project can control or influence. In NZ construction, embed this into existing safety and risk systems so psychosocial risks are tracked alongside physical risks.

IMPLEMENTING CONTROLS & SUPPORTING WORKERS

1

Design better systems of work

Implement practical controls: realistic programming, adequate resourcing, clear roles, and defined decision pathways to reduce uncertainty.

2

Manage fatigue and lead consistently

Use reasonable hours, planned breaks, and recovery time—especially in peak phases. Model respectful leadership, address conflict early, and communicate expectations clearly.

3

Build psychological safety and keep engaging

Normalise wellbeing conversations and ensure access to EAP/peer support. Use check-ins, surveys, and workshops; share outcomes and show feedback leads to action to build trust.



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