Psychological Hazards and Controls for Rehabilitation Professionals

Module 6

What is a psychological hazard?

A psychological hazard is any hazard that affects the mental well-being or mental health of the worker by overwhelming individual coping mechanisms and impacting the worker's ability to work in a healthy and safe manner.

Sources of psychological hazards

Work Organizational Factors
- Workplace violence and harassment
- Working alone
- Change
- Technological change
- Fatigue and hours of work

Personal Factors
- Substance abuse
- Depression, anxiety, other mental illness
- Age-related factors
- Work-life conflict

Legislation related to Psychological Hazards

- According to OHS legislation, all workplace hazards must be identified and assessed for their risk level.
- There are several specific OHS Codes that apply to psychological hazards.
  - ➢ Part 27 of the OHS Code identifies workplace violence as a hazard and sets forth employer responsibilities.
  - ➢ Part 28 of the Code specifies requirements related to working alone.
  - ➢ The Alberta Employment Standards Code specifies number of consecutive hours that can be worked.

Hazard identification and assessment of risk level

- The Rehabilitation Professional should carefully assess the potential for exposure to psychological hazards related to the work environment, working conditions, as well as to individual clients.
- Controls should be implemented for each hazard, using the hierarchy of controls.

Decreasing effectiveness of controls

Engineering

Administrative

Personal Controls
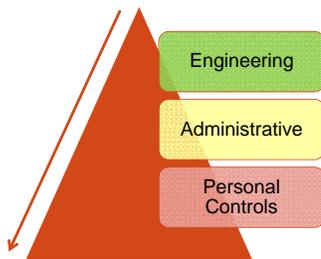
Violence or abuse

- Violence or abuse by clients or co-workers
- Controls

Engineering controls – Controlled access, work area design, video surveillance, lighting, alarm systems , panic buttons

Administrative controls – Management policies and procedures, training, escorts to and from parking lots, liaison with police, key control, reporting procedures, nametags

Personal controls – Assertiveness training, mediation, counselling services, ability to request support

If you may be exposed to violence...

- Ensure that you know and follow the employer's procedures for dealing with violence.
  - ➢ Definitions of harassment, abuse, bullying, and violence
  - ➢ What training is available
  - ➢ How to obtain assistance
  - ➢ Where to report the incident
  - ➢ How to document the incident
  - ➢ What type of follow-up is provided
- If you are a private provider, ensure you conduct a risk level assessment for each client and plan your response and precautionary actions.

Working alone

- Hazards of working alone that relate to assaults, threatening actions, or medical conditions that may impact obtaining prompt assistance
- Controls

Engineering controls – Restricted access, workplace design, communication devices, lighting, mirrors, surveillance cameras

Administrative controls – Scheduling to avoid lone workers, worker training, working alone policy and procedures, adequate security

Personal controls – Compliance with all established communication protocols

Do you work alone?

- If you work alone at a workplace
- If assistance is <u>not readily available</u> if you are injured or ill
- Consider traveling to and from a client's home, working in isolated locations, working away from the sight of others, etc.

What is "readily available" assistance?

- ➢ Awareness by others that the worker needs help
- ➢ Willingness of others to provide help
- ➢ Timeliness of help provided

Personal controls for working alone

- Based on hazard assessment, develop a plan to ensure communication.
  - ➢ Know and follow the employer's procedures.

- If you are a private provider, you are still required to assess the hazard of working alone for yourself and develop a plan to ensure communication.
  - ➢ May include call-in arrangements
  - ➢ Cell phones or satellite phones
  - ➢ Emergency GPS tracker, etc.

"Technostress"

- Stress related to the introduction of new technology or the expectations surrounding the use of technology
- Controls

Engineering controls – Instrument and equipment or software design with user-friendly features

Administrative controls – Sufficient training, worker participation, problem solving resources, back-up plans in the event of failure, change management, realistic expectations and priorities

Personal controls – Self-education, time management, open communication, healthy lifestyles, limit multi-tasking, technology "time-outs"

If you feel overwhelmed by the technology...

- Request additional training if technology is provided by the employer.
- Speak to your manager and request assistance.
- Take time to practice on your own.
- If you are choosing the technology, ensure that you obtain training from the provider of the equipment or technology.
- If email becomes a major problem, schedule "email time" and remove yourself from being constantly available.

Impacts of aging

- Hazards related to impacts of aging on workers, such as decreased physical strength, effects of medication, impacts on mental processes, etc.
- Controls

Administrative controls – Management policies to prevent any age discrimination, policies to accommodate aging workers, training, intergenerational communication training, mentoring programs, flexible work arrangements, job redesign

Personal controls – Healthy lifestyles, use of client/material handling equipment, adequate sleep, awareness of medication side effects

If you feel that aspects of aging are impacting your work...

- Be aware of physical and psychological aspects of the aging process.
- Modify your work or ask to have work modified to accommodate physical aspects of aging.
- Consider alternative work scheduling, part-time work, etc.
- Be aware of communication differences across the generations.

Shiftwork and hours of work

- Hazards related to working extended hours or working varied shifts
- Controls

Engineering controls – Work environment design, lighting, appropriate thermal environment, safe, secure work environment
Administrative controls – Management policies for shift design and working hours, limiting overtime, training in fatigue and shift work issues, appropriate breaks
Personal controls – Sleep schedule and environment, diet to accommodate shift schedule, healthy lifestyle, exercise, safe commuting plan, alertness strategies used, taking breaks

If you think you suffer from effects of shift work or extended work hours...

- Recognize the signs of fatigue.
- Speak to your manager.
- Try to have your shifts rotate forward.
- Do not plan to work too many hours or too many night shifts in a row.

Work-life conflict

- Stress related to trying to balance the demands of work and home life
- Controls

Administrative controls – Policies supporting good work-life balance (voluntary reduced hours, phased in retirement, telecommuting, job sharing, dependant care initiatives, etc.)
Personal controls – Separate work from home activities, protect time off, develop good social support networks, good sleep habits

If you feel that work is taking over your life...

- Identify ways to cut down on the workload – take on less assignments or contracts, learn time management skills, separate work from home life activities, communicate with your manager and consider reduced hours or flexible schedules.
- Take active steps to improve the work-life balance, including wellness programs, exercise and good nutrition and sleep practices.

Negative impacts of workplace stress on individuals

- Substance abuse
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Sleep disorders
- Other mental illness

Controlling the impact

- Know the symptoms of these conditions that may be negative impacts of excessive stress.
- Seek professional assistance in dealing with these conditions.
- Develop and maintain a good support system.
- Consider using the Employee Assistance Program.
- Focus on healthy lifestyle choices, including exercise, attention to proper nutrition and establishing good sleep habits.

What can you do to prevent exposures to psychological hazards?

- Develop and regularly review hazard assessments related to psychological hazards.
- Recognize that the hazard may vary according to the client or situation and develop action plans accordingly.
- Ensure plans are in place proactively to deal with violence or abuse.
- Identify working alone situations and develop control strategies.
- Actively participate in employer programs, procedures and plans to reduce psychological hazards in the workplace.