

# Managing Psychosocial hazards



# What does legislation require?

- **Identify and assess risks to worker health**
- **Select and implement controls for risks to worker health**
- **Develop a Worker Health Plan for worker health**



# What risks to worker health are we talking about?

- **Noise**
- **Vibration**
- **Dust, including asbestos dust, coal dust, silica dust, or mixed dust (being dust that contains mixtures of more than one different kind of dust)**
- **Diesel particulates**
- **Fumes, including exhaust fumes, welding fumes and other fumes arising**
- **Temperature, including extreme hot and cold temperatures, and humidity**
- **Changes in atmospheric pressure**
- **Manual handling and lifting**
- **Hours of work and fatigue**
- **Psychosocial hazards**
- **Ultraviolet radiation**
- **Ionising radiation**
- **Biological hazard**

# Psychosocial hazards are:

- **Bullying** – Repeated, unreasonable behaviour directed towards a worker or a group of workers such as victimising, humiliating, intimidating or threatening a person
- **Harassment** - When someone directs attention to another person including watching, loitering, following, accosting, interfering with another person's property or acting in ways that causes the person to fear for their safety (includes making people feel uncomfortable)
- **Violence** - Acts of violence towards a person can be verbal (verbal abuse, threats, shouting, swearing) or physical (stalking, throwing objects, hitting, damage to property)
- **Stress** - Indicators of excessive stress include increases in sick leave, absenteeism, tiredness, irritability and errors.

**2016 study claims New Zealand has the second highest rate of workplace bullying in the world**

**1 in 5 NZ workers experience some level of harassment at work**

**Est 400,000 workers**

**In Australia it is estimated to cost Organisations \$6 -\$36 billion p.a.**



# Bullying

- Supervisor victimising or belittling a worker, including intimidation or verbal abuse
- A worker or group of workers picking on a fellow worker, including belittling comments, ridiculing, physical attacks
- Subjecting younger workers to humiliation
- Unfair threats of dismissal
- Unwanted sexual advances
- Theft or destruction of property
- Intrusion on privacy, such as being spied on or stalked

*Behaviour must be unreasonable and repeated to constitute bullying*



# What is not Bullying ?

- **Disciplinary procedures**
- **Giving constructive feedback**
- **Telling employees how to do their work**
- **Performance management**



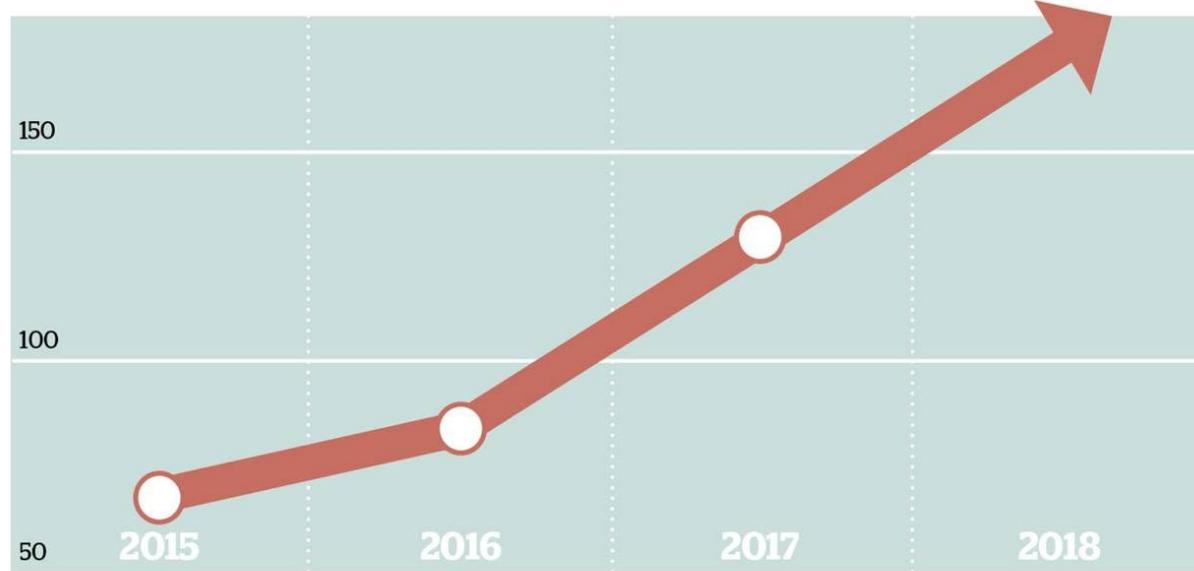
# Harassment

- Unwanted sexual advances
- Jokes related to sex, race, culture etc.
- Printed material that is disrespectful to workers as a result of their ethnicity, sex, cultural diversity
- Insults based on ethnicity, sex, cultural diversity

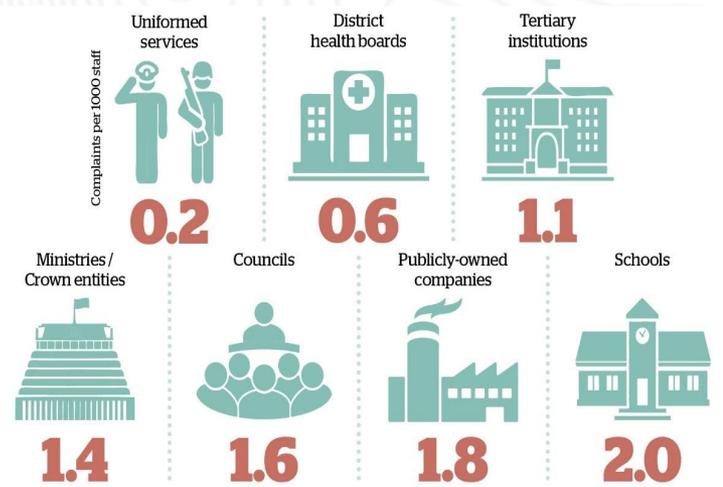


**Harassment exists if a worker or member of the public feel uncomfortable as a result of any of the above**

# SEXUAL HARASSMENT COMPLAINTS



Source: Official Information Act responses from 1397 public organisations



**No. of complaints per 1000 workers**

# Violence

- Physical acts against another person such as stalking, throwing objects, hitting, pushing, arguments
- Verbal abuse, threats, shouting, rumours or swearing
- Damage to property, vandalism, pranks or sabotage
- Physical assaults, psychological trauma, anger-related incidents, rape, arson and murder



**If acts of violence are repeated, they will constitute bullying**

# Stress

- **Pressures of work, either actual or perceived**
- **Unexpected responsibilities, timelines**
- **Excessive working hours, lack of sleep**
- **External pressures, family, social, mental health**



**Stress can be caused by other psychosocial hazards**



# Behavior associated with the impacts of psychosocial hazards

- **Turning up to work late**
- **Finding it hard to meet reasonable deadlines**
- **Withdrawing from colleagues**
- **Relying on alcohol and sedatives**
- **Taking excessive sick leave**
- **Having difficulty concentrating or managing multiple demands**
- **Low morale**

*In 2017-18:*

**WORKSAFE**  
NEW ZEALAND | MAHI HAUHARU  
AOTEAROA

*Research and analysis*



**9% OF  
WORKERS**

**REPORT EXPERIENCING STRESS OR  
ANOTHER MENTAL HEALTH CONDITION  
WITHIN THE PREVIOUS 12 MONTHS**



**25% of Australians suffer from  
some level of mental illness  
(commonly anxiety, depression  
or substance-use disorders)**

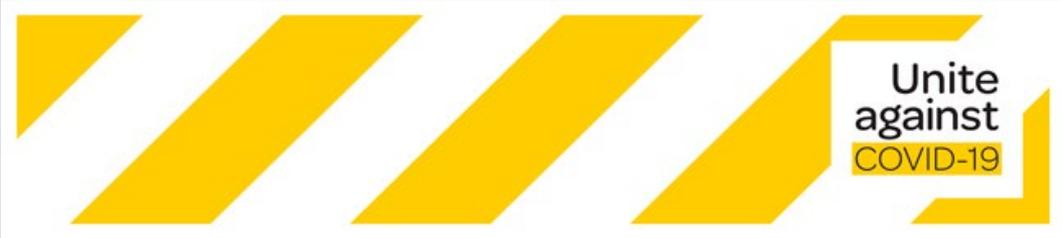
# COVID-19

Unite  
against  
COVID-19

- **Many feel angry, scared, sad or worried**
- **Some are feeling anxious about COVID (sickness, ,loss of work and/or income)**
- **External pressures – Children at home, no social contact with others, what is our new “normal”**



# What will help



Unite  
against  
COVID-19

- **Keep in touch with others via phone, Skype, Zoom, Facetime or social media**
- **Make a routine for yourself that involves exercise, food you like and some fun things**
- **Provide support to others which may include checking in with a health professional like a doctor, nurse or counsellor**
- **Explain that how people are feeling is normal**
- **Employee Assistance Programme**

**COVID-19 Website**  
**<https://covid19.govt.nz>**

# Workplace example:

- **Mary is an outgoing, friendly transport allocator, who has been in the job for 10 years**
- **Her supervisor, Bob, is a married man 20 years her senior, and is approaching retirement**
- **Over a beer after work, Mary mentions to a fellow worker that Bob has made unwanted sexual advances to her.**
- **The worker calls you after stewing on it for a week and tells you what Mary told him.**



# Workplace example:

- You speak to Mary, who breaks down telling you her story. You send her on indefinite paid leave.
- You speak to Bob who vehemently denies the allegation.
- Independent investigator is employed to investigate the allegation.

## Conclusion of the investigation:

**That in probability Bob did make sexual advances to Mary  
BUT THERE IS NO PROOF.**

# Outcome:

- **There can be no winners in this situation.**
- **Mary left the company being unable to return to the workplace and face Bob or fellow workers.**
- **Bob was given a written warning and shortly later retired from work.**
- **The process took 3 months and subjected many people to stress.**

**Failure to intervene however could have escalated the problem.**

# How do we manage psychosocial hazards

## **Rule 1 - Build a constructive, healthy employment relationship**

- **Employees, employers and unions are obliged to deal with each other at all times in good faith (act honestly, openly, and without hidden motives, work constructively and positively together )**
- **For an employer to take any action against an employee they must have a genuine or valid reason**
- **When undertaking any action against an employee, the employer must follow a fair process**

# How do we manage psychosocial hazards

## **Rule 2 – Stop issues before they start**

- **Take time to communicate clearly (includes listening)**
- **Raise concerns when they first come up. This can help stop them becoming bigger and harder to resolve**
- **Make sure workplace policies, practices and/or work rules are well communicated and easy to understand**
- **Put in place effective systems and processes for setting performance expectations and managing performance issues.**

# How do we manage psychosocial hazards

## Rule 3 – Develop procedures for dealing with issues

- **Put in place processes to address and investigate complaints that employees raise of bullying, discrimination, or sexual harassment (Consider an Employee Assistance Programme)**
- **Promote a culture where everyone shares the responsibility for preventing and clearing up confusion or mistakes.** (For example, if an employee believes they are being overpaid, the employee should raise the potential error)
- **Employees and employers should keep themselves well informed about their employment rights and responsibilities**

# Employee Assistance Programme (EAP)

An Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is a free and confidential counselling service offered by employers to their employees to support their well-being in the workplace and in their personal lives.

- Confidential advice
- Independent investigations
- Counselling services



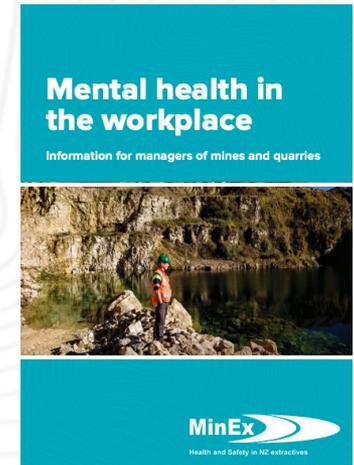
*If you are not confident dealing with these issues it may help to engage an expert.*

# First steps in dealing with a problem

- **If an employer or employee thinks there is a problem, it should be raised as soon as possible**
- **Do something - Ignoring a problem and hoping it will go away, can lead to bigger problems later**
- **Don't jump to conclusions when an issue is first raised. Any decisions should be made fairly and consistently. Gather information and think before acting**
- **Treat each other with respect and consideration, and deal with issues in a confidential manner**
- **It may help to have a third party present as a witness when a problem is discussed, to prevent misunderstandings**

# Where to get help

- *Regulators*
- *Employee Assistance specialists*
- *Training (MinEx)*
- *IOQ*





## Questions ???

**Wayne Scott**

**[wayne@minex.org.nz](mailto:wayne@minex.org.nz)**

**mobile: 021 944 336**