

Digital Exploitation and AI Burnout



While summer often brings physical hazards like heat stress to the forefront, many OHS managers are turning their attention to a quieter but equally serious concern: the toll of psychosocial risks. Workloads are climbing, and in many workplaces—especially in the gig economy and remote work environments—employees are feeling the pressure from digital surveillance and algorithm-driven management systems. These factors are strongly linked to rising rates of stress, burnout, and anxiety.

The ITUC-Asia Pacific recently sounded the alarm on what it calls “digital exploitation”—things like eroded rest time, nonstop monitoring, and relentless performance tracking—all of which can chip away at workers’ mental health. On top of that, there’s growing concern about workplace bullying and violence going unreported. For instance, a recent audit revealed thousands of incidents in education settings that were never formally logged.

To help tackle these challenges, OHS teams need to step up efforts to assess psychological hazards, offer safe and confidential ways for workers to report issues, and—just as importantly—create a workplace culture where people feel comfortable speaking up.

Psychological Hazard Assessment: Policy & Procedure

1. Why This Policy Exists

This policy is here to help create a consistent, practical approach to spotting and addressing psychological hazards in the workplace. It's designed to meet (or go beyond) Canadian OHS laws and standards like CSA Z1003 and ISO 45003. At the heart of it, this is about protecting your team from mental harm related to work.

2. Who This Applies To

Everyone. That includes all staff—full-time, part-time, contract, temps, and volunteers—no matter where they work in Canada or how (in person, hybrid, or remote). Everyone has a part to play in identifying and managing psychological risks.

3. Key Terms (in plain language)

- **Psychological hazard:** Anything at work that could harm mental health—like a crushing workload, unclear expectations, or bullying.
- **Psychological injury/illness:** A diagnosable mental health issue caused or worsened by work.
- **Risk assessment:** A process for figuring out how likely something is to go wrong and how bad it could be.
- **Control measures:** Steps you take to prevent harm—from changes in policy to better training.
- **Worker participation:** Actively involving employees in spotting and solving potential mental health risks.

4. Roles and Responsibilities

Senior Leadership

- Show visible support. That means funding, staffing, and prioritizing this work.
- Make sure policies line up with federal/provincial OHS rules.

HR & OHS Departments

- Keep this policy current, working with legal and mental health experts.
- Train OHS staff and Joint Health and Safety Committees (JHSCs) to recognize psychological risks.
- Make sure there are safe, confidential ways for workers to speak up.

Supervisors, OHS Managers & JHSC Members

- Lead the charge on assessments and follow up on reports.
- Get trained in spotting early warning signs of stress.
- Work with HR to manage reports and recommend solutions.

Workers

- Speak up about stress, burnout, or anything that affects your mental well-being.
- Take part in training and follow the steps for reporting issues.
- Help the team during assessments—honest input makes a real difference.

5. Step-by-Step Procedure

Step 1: Build Your Assessment Team

Bring together people from OHS, HR, the JHSC, and if possible, a mental health consultant. Get leadership's okay on the team's role, decision-making power, and timelines.

Step 2: Plan the Assessment

- Pick where to start—maybe departments with high pressure, shift work, or lots of customer contact.
- Build a 12-week timeline (training, surveys, interviews, analysis, and recommendations).
- Let everyone know what's happening and why. Use all your channels—email, meetings, posters—to spread the word.

Step 3: Gather What You Already Know

- Review sick leave, turnover, past incident reports, and accommodation requests.
- Check existing policies—are they helping or hurting mental health?
- Stay compliant with local laws, but know that this process is built to meet or beat what's required.

Step 4: Spot the Hazards

- Use confidential surveys that follow Canadian standards (like CSA Z1003).
- Host focus groups or private interviews to hear people's real experiences.
- Get supervisors' insights—what systemic issues do they see?
- Observe the environment—things like overcrowded break rooms or constant interruptions add up.

Step 5: Score the Risks

- Use a simple matrix to rate each hazard by how often it happens and how serious it is.
- Mix survey results with what you've heard in focus groups.
- Prioritize the biggest risks and back up your decisions with real-world examples.

Step 6: Take Action

Use a hierarchy of control:

1. **Eliminate/Substitute:** If possible, remove the source (e.g., cut long shifts).
2. **Engineering Controls:** Improve the environment (quiet spaces, ergonomic workstations).
3. **Administrative Controls:** Tweak policies (reasonable deadlines, mandatory breaks, limit off-hours emails).
4. **Personal Supports:** Offer things like EFAP, peer support, and mental health training.

For each big hazard, make a clear action plan:

- Who's responsible
- When it'll be done
- How success will be measured (e.g., better survey scores or fewer sick days)

Step 7: Monitor and Review

- Track key indicators during regular H&S checks—like harassment complaints or mental health leave.
- Share quarterly updates with leadership and the JHSC.
- Reassess every two years—or sooner if your organization goes through major change.

Step 8: Keep Good Records

- Store all assessment data securely.
- Keep training logs and communications.
- Protect personal health information according to privacy laws.

6. Training and Skills

- Everyone involved—OHS managers, JHSC, and

supervisors—needs four hours of training on spotting and managing psychological risks (within three months of starting their role).

- Annual two-hour refreshers are a must.
- Anyone running focus groups or interviews needs specific training in sensitive conversations and mental health red flags.

7. Communication and Engagement

- Kick things off with town halls or online Q&As.
- After each assessment, share top risks and the plan to address them (without revealing personal info).
- Encourage ongoing feedback—through meetings, anonymous suggestions, or a dedicated intranet space.

8. Keep Getting Better

- Review this policy every year to stay up-to-date with laws and best practices.
- Compare your performance to others in your sector—look for red flags like high absenteeism.
- Learn from incidents and near misses. If psychological strain contributed to a safety issue, revise your tools and processes.

By using our [survey](#), [interview script](#), and this summary guide, OHS managers can systematically identify, assess, and respond to psychosocial hazards—promoting a mentally healthier workplace and ensuring compliance with best-practice standards.