



TRAUMATIC EVENTS OR MATERIALS

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WHAT ARE TRAUMATIC EVENTS OR MATERIALS

This hazard involves exposure to incidents or materials that can have a severe impact on a person's mental and emotional well-being. Traumatic events or materials encompass a wide range of distressing situations, such as accidents, violence, natural disasters, or witnessing or experiencing traumatic incidents. They can also include exposure to disturbing materials like graphic images, videos, or content related to violence, abuse, or traumatic events.

Secondary and vicarious trauma arises when a worker is exposed to a fatality or is engaged in the investigation of a severe injury or fatality. Additionally, some workers may regularly encounter the task of listening to detailed accounts of traumatic or distressing events experienced by others.

The psychological and social consequences of exposure to traumatic events or materials can be significant. Individuals may experience symptoms such as anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), sleep disturbances, flashbacks, and intrusive thoughts. These hazards can also affect interpersonal relationships, job performance, and overall quality of life.

EXAMPLES OF TRAUMATIC EVENTS OR MATERIALS

- observing or examining a situation involving death, severe harm, mistreatment, neglect, or significant incidents
- being in contact with individuals who are severely injured or deceased encountering fear or
- engaging in highly dangerous situations
- being exposed to natural catastrophes
- observing or investigating acts of terrorism or warfare assisting individuals who have experienced distressing and traumatic occurrences
- hearing or reading accounts of painful and traumatic experiences endured by others
- discovering proof of criminal activities or traumatic incidents
- experiencing events that trigger traumatic memories



IMPACTS OF TRAUMATIC EVENTS OR MATERIALS

The impacts of inadequate reward and recognition on both workers and organisations is numerous. Some impacts to consider are:

ON WORKERS

Emotional Distress: Workers may experience a range of emotional responses such as anxiety, depression, guilt, anger, or fear as a result of their exposure to traumatic events or materials.

Psychological Trauma: Traumatic events can lead to the development of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or other psychological disorders, which can significantly affect a worker's mental well-being and daily functioning.

Physical Health Issues: The stress and emotional toll of traumatic events can manifest in physical symptoms such as headaches, fatigue, sleep disturbances, gastrointestinal problems, and increased susceptibility to illnesses.

Impaired Job Performance: Workers may find it challenging to concentrate, make decisions, or perform their tasks effectively due to the intrusive thoughts or emotional burden associated with traumatic events or materials.

Interpersonal Difficulties: Traumatic events can strain relationships with colleagues, friends, and family members, as workers may withdraw socially or struggle to communicate their experiences and emotions.

Reduced Job Satisfaction and Burnout: Constant exposure to traumatic events or materials can lead to decreased job satisfaction, a loss of meaning in work, and ultimately contribute to burnout, leading to decreased productivity and increased turnover.

Secondary Traumatic Stress: Workers who provide support to individuals affected by traumatic events may experience secondary traumatic stress, where they develop symptoms similar to those of the

ON ORGANISATIONS

Decreased Employee Morale: Traumatic events can significantly impact the morale and motivation of employees within an organisation. Witnessing or experiencing traumatic events can create a sense of fear, uncertainty, and emotional distress among employees, leading to decreased job satisfaction and reduced productivity. Increased

Absenteeism and Turnover: Employees who are affected by traumatic events may require time off work to recover or seek treatment for their emotional well-being. Additionally, the emotional toll of traumatic events may cause some employees to leave the organisation altogether, leading to increased turnover rates.

Disrupted Work Environment: Traumatic events can disrupt the overall work environment within an organisation. Fear, anxiety, or tension may permeate the workplace, affecting communication, teamwork, and collaboration among employees.

Reduced Productivity: Employees who have been exposed to traumatic events may experience difficulties concentrating, making decisions, or performing their duties effectively. This can lead to decreased productivity and efficiency within the organisation.

Increased Workers Compensation Claims and Financial Costs: Traumatic events can result in physical and mental health issues among employees, leading to increased costs for the organisation.

Increased Workload on Remaining Employees: If traumatic events result in absenteeism or turnover, the workload on remaining employees may increase. This can lead to additional stress, burnout, and potential resentment within the workforce.



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individuals they are helping.

Vicarious Trauma: Workers who regularly hear or read about distressing events experienced by others may experience vicarious trauma, where they internalise the trauma and exhibit symptoms similar to those directly exposed to the traumatic events.

Disrupted Personal Life: Traumatic events can spill over into a worker's personal life, affecting their relationships, hobbies, and overall quality of life.

Long-Term Effects: If not addressed, the impacts of traumatic events on workers can persist over the long term, potentially leading to chronic psychological and physical health issues

Need for Organisational Support and Intervention:

Organisations are responsible for providing support, resources, and interventions to help employees cope with traumatic events. This may involve implementing employee assistance programs, counselling services, training programs, and creating a supportive work environment that addresses the emotional needs of employees.

RISK MANAGEMENT

Risk Management involves identifying potential risks, assessing their likelihood and impact, and developing strategies to mitigate or control them. It is a proactive process that seeks to prevent risks from occurring or minimise their impact if they do occur.

No person should be injured in their workplace, including psychological injury. To meet their duties to ensure health and safety, employers must identify and eliminate or minimise psychosocial risks so far as is reasonably practicable. How long (duration), how often (frequency) and how significantly (severity) workers are exposed to psychosocial hazards impacts the level of risks. Hazards interacting or combining with each other may also impact this. Further guidance on the risk management process is available in the Code of Practice: [***How to manage work health and safety risks.***](#) For more information on the risk management process for psychosocial hazards, please view [***Section 2 of the Model Code of Practice.***](#)

Mind Your Head advocates for *prevention* – that is, identifying risk, implementing or changing systems to prevent worker harm or injury *before it occurs*.

Examples of Risk Management Strategies for Traumatic Events and Materials include:

- **Risk Assessment:** Conduct a comprehensive assessment to identify potential traumatic events or materials that may impact the organisation and its employees. Evaluate the likelihood and severity of each risk.



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- **Training and Education:** Provide employees with training programs and educational resources to increase their awareness and knowledge about traumatic events, their potential impacts, and strategies for coping and resilience.
- **Policies and Procedures:** Develop and implement clear policies and procedures that outline how traumatic events or materials should be reported, managed, and responded to within the organisation. Include guidelines for providing support to affected employees.
- **Emergency Response Planning:** Establish and regularly update an emergency response plan that includes protocols for managing traumatic events. Ensure that employees are trained in emergency procedures and that there are designated individuals responsible for coordinating responses.
- **Psychosocial Support:** Provide access to mental health resources, such as employee assistance programs and similar services, or trauma-informed care, to support employees before, during, and after traumatic events.
- **Communication and Information Sharing:** Establish effective communication channels to share information, updates, and resources related to traumatic events or materials. Ensure that employees have access to accurate and timely information.
- **Peer Support and Debriefing:** Facilitate peer support programs or support groups where employees can share their experiences, provide emotional support, and engage in debriefing sessions to process traumatic events.

WAYS TO MANAGE RISKS

Consult workers and HSRs. Establish Health and Safety Committees with at least 50% representation from workers. Encourage feedback, especially on any changes.

Consider how long, how often and how severely workers are exposed to hazards. The longer, more often and worse the low job control, the higher the risk that workers may be harmed.

Utilise surveys and tools to assess psychosocial risks in the workplace, particularly for businesses with over 20 employees.

Establish a system for workers to report their concerns, while ensuring anonymity and treating their concerns with respect and seriousness to encourage reporting.

Observe work and behaviours, such as prolonged work duration, excessive paperwork, or customer frustration, which may indicate low job control.

Review available information, including employee retention, incident reports, complaints, time-off records, injuries, incidents, and workers' compensation to identify potential hazards.



Identify other hazards present and evaluate how they may interact or combine to create new, heightened risks. For instance, low job control could pose a greater risk in workplaces with high job demands if workers are unable to take breaks or switch tasks to manage fatigue. Finally, consider the duration, frequency, and severity of workers' exposure to hazards, as prolonged and severe exposure to low job control could increase the risk of harm.

CONTROL MEASURES

Control measures are specific actions or procedures that are put in place to manage or mitigate identified risks. They are reactive measures that are implemented after risks have been identified and assessed as part of the risk management process. Control measures are designed to reduce the likelihood or impact of risks, and they can take many forms, including administrative controls, engineering controls, and personal protective equipment.

Engineering Controls: Implement physical measures to minimize the risk of traumatic events or exposure to hazardous materials. This may include safety barriers, ventilation systems, or personal protective equipment.

Administrative Controls: Establish administrative measures to reduce the risk of traumatic events or materials. This can involve implementing work procedures, safety protocols, and training programs that promote safe practices and awareness.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE): Provide appropriate personal protective equipment to employees who may encounter traumatic events or hazardous materials, such as gloves, masks, or protective clothing.

Hazard Identification and Reporting: Encourage employees to report potential hazards or traumatic events promptly. Establish a reporting system and ensure that employees are aware of the process for reporting incidents or concerns.

Regular Safety Inspections: Conduct routine safety inspections to identify and address potential hazards or unsafe conditions related to traumatic events or materials. Take prompt action to mitigate identified risks.

Security Measures: Implement security protocols to prevent or respond to potential acts of terrorism or violence. This may include access control systems, surveillance cameras, or security personnel.

Workplace Design: Consider the layout and design of the workplace to minimize the risk of traumatic events. This can involve well-lit areas, clear signage, and emergency exit routes that are easily accessible.



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Ongoing Risk Monitoring and Review: Continuously monitor and review the effectiveness of risk management strategies and control measures in addressing traumatic events or materials. Make adjustments and improvements as necessary.

DO

Establish a systematic approach for managing the risks associated with violence and trauma in the workplace.

Engage in consultation with individuals who may potentially encounter violence or trauma while working.

Assign specific roles to individuals in the event of a violent incident, such as one person providing support to the affected worker, another contacting the police, and another redirecting the public.

Conduct research on various control measures, such as personal alarms, barriers at counters to deter aggression, and mirrors strategically placed to make offenders aware of their behaviour.

When dealing with situations where individuals need to be seen in enclosed areas, consult with employees to develop policies that ensure safe interactions, such as positioning worker desks near the door and installing emergency alarms on desks.

Initiate timely contact with any employee affected by traumatic events to assess their well-being and strongly encourage professional support.

Implement support services such as an Employee Assistance Program to offer support services to employees dealing with the effects of violence or trauma.

Ensure that all managers have a thorough understanding of the challenges and experiences faced by the workforce.

Develop inclusive policies that provide support and demonstrate how the organisation will safeguard workers from the potential risks associated with secondary trauma.

DO NOT

Require workers to operate independently in situations where there is a possibility of violence or trauma.

Fail to engage in consultation with the individuals performing the work or overlook the importance of consulting with workers when implementing measures to protect their well-being.

Disregard the potential risks of violence and trauma faced by workers.

Place the burden of coping and managing without managerial assistance or support solely on the workers.

Assume that workers will effectively manage secondary and vicarious trauma, despite research indicating otherwise.

Underestimate the potential psychological harm that can result from witnessing traumatic incidents.