INPLASY

Decision making about Psychosocial Hazards and Risk in Workplaces: A Scoping Review

Corresponding author:
Ian FIRTH

i.firth@uq.net.au

Author Affiliation:
The Centre for Business and Organisational Psychology and the UQ Business School, The University of Queensland.

Firth, I; Way, K; Li, YQ.

ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

Support - Nil.

Review Stage at time of this submission - Formal screening of search results against eligibility criteria.

Conflicts of interest - None declared.

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Amendments - This protocol was registered with the International Platform of Registered Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis Protocols (INPLASY) on 13 November 2024 and was last updated on 13 November 2024.

INTRODUCTION

Review question / Objective Review questions: 1. How do workplace stakeholders (including labour inspectorates) perceive and understand psychosocial hazards and risk?
2. How do workplace stakeholders (including labour inspectorates) make decisions regarding psychosocial hazards and risk?
3. What factors influence risk perception and decision making of workplace stakeholders (including labour inspectorates) regarding psychosocial hazards and risk?

Background Work characteristics that have negative implications for psychological and physical health via worker experience of prolonged or severe stress are known as psychosocial hazards (PSHs) (Way, 2020). PSHs encompass a range of work characteristics such as role overload, emotional demands, low job control, workplace violence, bullying, and harassment. In addition to adverse effects on employee mental health, these hazards can negatively impact job satisfaction and productivity. In Australia, the cost of PSHs has been estimated at up to $3.98 billion (USD), in the US up to $187 billion, in Canada upward of $9.59 billion (USD), in the United Kingdom up to $23.63 billion (USD), and within the EU up to €26.47 billion (Hassard et al., 2018).
Perhaps compounding these negative implications, PSHs pose challenges for workplace decision-makers including those at the business level (e.g., managers and supervisors, health and safety representatives), and WHS regulators (e.g., policymakers and inspectors from regulatory bodies). PSHs are often less visible and have interactive, additive, or cumulative effects in creating psychosocial risk. They can also overlap

with industrial relations concerns in the workplace (Jespersen et al., 2016). Indeed, findings indicate that workplace stakeholders have differing views on PSHs, are uncertain about how to manage associated risks, and often prioritize physical hazards over PSHs (Boland, 2018; Potter et al., 2019). Further, there is ambiguity about who has accountability for minimising the risk (Schuller, 2019), and labour inspectorates enforcing WHS laws face resource constraints and capability limitations in responding to PSHs (Potter et al., 2019; Popple et al., 2021), which may impact their decision making.

While there are challenges in decision-making stemming from the very nature of PSHs, there are also related concerns about the application of specific decision-making processes required in Work Health and Safety (WHS) laws regulating PSHs (Potter et al., 2019, Iavicoli et al., 2011). Decision criteria prescribed in numerous countries' WHS laws require a comprehensive risk management decision-making process with several elements to be considered when deciding whether psychosocial risk has been eliminated or minimised so far as is reasonably practicable. Some argue that these directives lack specificity regarding how decisions should be made or conclusions reached, leaving workplace decision-makers to formulate opinions by weighing multiple decision criteria (Ho, 2023). While WHS laws lay out these criteria for structuring decision-making for psychosocial risk management, we don't yet know whether this structured decision-making occurs in practice.

Rationale Given the significance of PSHs and the challenges faced by those managing them, there is an urgent need to understand how decisions are made when managing psychosocial risk, both in general and in the context of WHS laws. Understanding decisions about psychosocial risk management involves also understanding risk perception, which influences decisions (Willliams and Noyes, 2007). However, current literature lacks a comprehensive synthesis of the existing knowledge on the perception of psychosocial risk and workplace decision-making about PSHs. With rising costs and increasing legal responsibilities, understanding perceptions of psychosocial risk and decision-making processes—both within businesses and regulatory bodies—has become increasingly critical.

To bridge this gap, this scoping review aims to synthesize existing research on decision-making processes of workplace stakeholders (including labour inspectorates), in addressing psychosocial hazards and risk in the workplace.

METHODS

Strategy of data synthesis Information Sources
An initial limited search of APA PsycINFO and Scopus was conducted to identify relevant articles. Keywords and index terms extracted from the titles and abstracts of these articles were utilized to develop comprehensive search strings with reference to the definitions noted above. This strategy was adapted for each database or information source included. The reference lists of all included papers will be screened for additional relevant studies. The systematic search will be conducted in APA PsycINFO, ABI Inform, Scopus, and Web of Science. Sources will be managed using Endnote for collection and storage, and Covidence for screening.
Search Strategy
Population-Workplace Stakeholders
"duty-holder*" or "human resource*" or "union representative" or "manage*" or "leader" or "supervisor" or "executive" or "business-owner" or "decision-maker" OR "Inspector*" or "investigator" or "policy-maker" or "bureaucrat"
AND
Context - Work health and safety regulation
"Workplace" or "Work health and safety*" or "occupational health and safety*" or "occupational safety*" or "labour law*" or Work health and safety policy*" or "occupational health" or "WHS or OHS" or "labour or Labor" or "Regulat*" or "Legislati*" or "Law OR laws" or "Policy OR policies" or "standards" or "Compliance OR comply OR complie*" or "Enforc*"
AND
Concepts
Psychosocial hazards
Psychosocial hazards*" or "psychosocial risks*" or "psychosocial risk factors*" or "work stress*" or "psychological injury*" or "occupational stress*" or "human factors*" or "psychosocial work environment*" or "job stressor*" or "bully* OR harass* OR violen* OR aggressi* OR trauma* OR "job demand" OR "work demand" OR "job resource" OR "work resource" OR "job control" OR "work control" OR "social support" OR "supervisor support" OR "coworker support" OR "colleague support" OR "peer support" OR "emotion* support" OR "time pressure" OR "role overload" OR "work overload" OR "job overload" OR workload OR "job autonomy" or "role autonomy" OR "decision latitude" OR "decision authority" OR "work pace" OR "work conflict" OR "role conflict" OR "task conflict" OR "relationship conflict" OR "supervis* conflict" OR "interpersonal conflict" OR "role ambiguity" OR "role clarity" OR "procedural justice" OR justice OR fair OR unfair OR abus* OR dispute* OR "procedural injustice" OR "organi*

justice" OR "organi* injustice" OR "emotion* demand*" OR "cognitive demand" OR reward OR praise OR recognition OR "work* environment" OR "work* condition" OR "work related factor" OR "work related risk*" or "work related hazard" OR JDR OR "job demands-resources" OR ERI OR "effort-reward imbalance" OR JDC OR "job demands-control" OR "work pressure" OR "job pressure" OR "monotonous work" OR "work* hour*" OR overtime OR "work schedule" OR "skill discretion" OR overwork OR "remote work" OR "isolated work"

AND

Decision-making

Decision making*" or "cognti*" or "problem solving*" or "judgement*" or "probability*" or "heuristic*" or "attribution" or "risk perception" or "perceived risk"

OR

Reasonably practicable/risk

"Reasonably practicable*" or "precautionary principle*" or "reasonably foreseeable" or "residual risk" or "risk management" risk N4 manag* or "risk assessment" or "risk N4 assess*" or "risk N4 (analy* or anali*)" or "risk N4 (reduc* OR mitigat* OR interv* OR duration OR likelihood OR frequency OR control OR action OR measure* OR tolerat* OR accept* OR eliminat* OR minimis*)".

Eligibility criteria

Our inclusion criteria are based on the Population, Concept and Context (PCC) framework. To be included in the review, studies need to focus on each element of the PCC as defined below. Peer-reviewed journal articles, book chapters, conference proceedings' papers and theses that report empirical studies will be included. There will be no date limitation imposed. The review will include all study designs (e.g., experimental and quasi-experimental, correlational, cross-sectional and longitudinal, qualitative and mixed-method studies). Any reviews (scoping reviews, systematic reviews, meta-analyses) will be retained only to review their included studies list and to ensure any studies not already found in our original searches are included.

Studies will be excluded if they are not aligned with the PCC framework, full text is not available in English language, they are not peer reviewed, or they do not contain empirical findings (e.g., magazine articles and commentaries are excluded).

The scope, terminology, and keywords established in the PCC framework described below was developed based on an initial literature review and snowballing search.

Population

Our population of interest is workplace stakeholders who make decisions about psychosocial hazards and risk including Labour Inspectorates.

The following population definitions are used for the purposes of this review:

Business-level stakeholders – Those business actors who make decisions at the workplace level regarding any element of psychosocial risk management (e.g., human resources professionals, work health and safety professionals, union representatives, WHS representatives at the workplace level [Johannessen et al., 2022; Iavicoli et al., 2011]), as well as those in management roles (senior leaders [such as board members, CEOs, directors, and general managers (Samimi et al., 2022)], group managers, and line supervisors [Tappura et al., 2014]).

Labour inspectorates – Those actors who play a role (and thereby are likely to make decisions about psychosocial hazards and risk) when developing and enforcing WHS laws (e.g., WHS policymakers within government or associated labour agencies agencies [e.g., ILO], labour inspectors, work health and safety inspectors [Potter et al., 2019; Johnstone et al., 2011; Iavicoli et al., 2011]).

Context

Our review focuses on the context of workplaces and regulation of health and safety at work, defined for the purpose of this review as:

Regulation of health and safety at work - comprising any combination of WHS policy, legislation, standards, guidance, or enforcement and compliance activities, as well as economic drivers of WHS decisions in neo-liberal economies, and the day-to-day management of WHS at the workplace (Potter et al., 2019, Johnstone et al., 2011 and Iavicoli et al., 2011) whether it is influenced by compliance, economic, or wellbeing motives.

Concepts

Concepts that are the focus of this review include risk perception, decision-making, and risk management activities, specifically relating to the topic area of psychosocial hazards defined as follows:

Psychosocial Hazards - Aspects of social interaction, work design, and management practices that have the potential to cause stress-mediated harm, either psychological or physical (Way and Neall, 2024). The review will include studies that focus on any aspect of psychosocial hazards at work whether or not they also explore harm (with harm being the psychological or physical consequences of exposure, including injury or illness).

Psychosocial Risk perception - the subjective perception of the likelihood and potential for harm from exposure to psychosocial hazards (Leka et al., 2015, Clarke and Cooper, 2006). Risk perception is a cognitive and affective process that is an initiating step in decision-making and can be influenced by heuristics, emotion, and experience (Paek and Hove, 2017). Studies focusing on risk perception as a discrete element of decision-making will be included, irrespective of whether other elements of decision-making are also considered.

Decision-making - the cognitive process involving choice between alternatives, which is influenced by expected outcomes, including risks and benefits. Decision-making is shaped by the situation, the analysis, subjective risk perception, cognitive biases, emotional responses, and individual and social factors (Morelli et al.,2022). Incorporating risk perception, the decision-making process integrates both fast, intuitive judgments and slower, deliberate reasoning.

Risk management - refers to the systematic process of identifying, assessing, and mitigating risks to minimize their impact on an organization or individual (Aven, 2016). For the purposes of this review the concept of risk management extends to include the notion of 'reasonably practicable', which is defined as a standard requiring the measure to control risks are implemented as far as is reasonably possible, considering what is known about the risk, potential harm, how to control it and the cost (Cross, 2019).

Source of evidence screening and selection
Methods
No current or in-progress reviews relating to risk perception or decision-making in managing psychosocial hazards and risk were found in a search of Open Science Framework, Prospero, JBI and INPLASY. Given the limited literature available on this topic, and the broad range of relevant concepts and theories, a scoping review was selected as the most appropriate method for knowledge synthesis.

The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-analyses extension for scoping review (PRISMA-ScR; Tricco et al., 2018) is utilised for this scoping review. Papers that meet the inclusion criteria will be screened and managed using Covidence. Two reviewers will independently assess titles and abstracts, with any discrepancies resolved through discussion with a third reviewer. Full-text reviews will be conducted by two independent reviewers, with reasons for exclusion documented. Data will be extracted by two independent reviewers and analysed using a narrative synthesis approach. Disagreements

between reviewers in study selection and extraction will be resolved through discussion or consultation with additional reviewers.

Data management
Study selection
Upon completion of the search, all identified citations will be consolidated and imported into EndNote. Duplicate entries will be eliminated before transferring the remaining citations to Covidence for title and abstract screening and subsequent full-text review. Following a pilot test, two or more independent reviewers will assess titles and abstracts against the predetermined inclusion criteria for the review. The full text of selected citations will then be evaluated in detail by two independent reviewers using the inclusion criteria. Sources not meeting the criteria will be excluded, and the reasons for exclusion will be documented and reported in the scoping review. Any discrepancies between reviewers will be resolved through discussion or consultation with additional reviewers. The results of the search and the study selection process will be comprehensively reported in the final scoping review, following the guidelines outlined in the PRISMA-ScR diagram (Tricco et al., 2018).

Data Extraction
Data will be extracted by two or more independent reviewers using a data extraction tool specifically developed for this purpose. The extracted data will encompass participant details, conceptual framework, contextual information, study methodologies, and key findings relevant to the review questions. A preliminary data extraction form is provided. The extraction tool will be iteratively refined as necessary during the data extraction process, with any modifications documented in the scoping review. Disagreements between reviewers will be resolved through discussion or consultation with additional reviewers. Authors of papers may be contacted to obtain missing or supplementary data if required.

Reporting results / Analysis of the evidence
Synthesis and Presentation of Results
The presentation of results will be incorporated into a comprehensive scoping review report, which will include a table summarizing the characteristics of included studies, along with a description of population demographics, contextual factors, and key concepts. A narrative synthesis approach will be employed to explore the range of concepts and provide an understanding of the current literature.

Language restriction
Studies will be excluded if they are not aligned with the PCC framework, full text is not available in English language, they are

not peer reviewed, or they do not contain empirical findings (e.g., magazine articles and commentaries are excluded).

Country(ies) involved Australia.

Other relevant information Implications
This review aims to synthesize knowledge regarding risk perception and decision-making about psychosocial hazards and risk among workplace stakeholders, including labour inspectorates. Given the escalating costs and impacts associated with PSH and recent enhancements in legal requirements, understanding the decision-making process of these actors is increasingly crucial. By enhancing our understanding in this area, this review has the potential to improve psychosocial risk management and mitigate work-related mental health problems and their associated costs and impacts.

Keywords Psychosocial hazard, psychosocial risk, psychological injury, mental health, work stress, Work Health Safety (WHS) Regulation, WHS.

Dissemination plans The findings will be disseminated through the publication of a scoping review paper.

Contributions of each author
Author 1 - Ian Firth - Author 1 project conceptualisation, data analysis strategy, review of protocol manuscript, data collection and drafting manuscript.
Email: i.firth@uq.net.au
Author 2 - Associate Professor Kirsten Way - The author worked on project conceptualisation, data analysis strategy and review of protocol manuscript.
Email: k.way@psy.uq.edu.au
Author 3 - Dr Yiqiong Li - The author worked on project conceptualisation, data analysis strategy and review of protocol manuscript.
Email: yiqiong.li@business.uq.edu.au