Psychosocial hazards and vicarious trauma

Psychosocial hazards are factors in the work environment that may cause an employee to have a negative psychological response, increasing the likelihood of mental injury. Psychosocial hazards may operate in combination to increase the risk of mental injury.

Common psychosocial hazards include (but are not limited to):

- high job demands
- low job control
- poor support
- low role clarity
- remote or isolated work

- low recognition and reward
- poor workplace relationships
- sexual harassment
- exposure to traumatic content or events.

Notably, exposure to traumatic content is a psychosocial hazard. It is the primary psychosocial hazard contributing to the risk of vicarious trauma. Without exposure to traumatic content, employees may still be at risk of mental injury; however, they won't be at risk of vicarious trauma specifically.

Beyond exposure to traumatic content, other psychosocial hazards also contribute to the risk that an employee will experience vicarious trauma. International research has identified several 'organisational correlates' of vicarious trauma, which align with common psychosocial hazards.

Some of the factors identified by research include:

Factor	Psychosocial Hazard
an organisational culture that does not acknowledge the impact of trauma on employees and the organisation	poor organisational justice
high workloads, and/or workloads that involve frequent exposure to traumatic content	high job demands
work environments that are not safe, comfortable, and private	poor environmental conditions
lack of education, training, and/or continuing professional development for staff, including training on vicarious trauma	support
a lack of social support within the organisation (formal or informal)	support
a lack of effective supervision, where staff feel unable to express "fears, concerns, and inadequacies" (Bell, Kulkarni & Dalton, 2003, p. 468)[1]	support

[1] Bell, H., Kulkarni, S., & Dalton, L. (2003). Organizational prevention of vicarious trauma. *Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Human Services, 84*(4), 463-470.

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