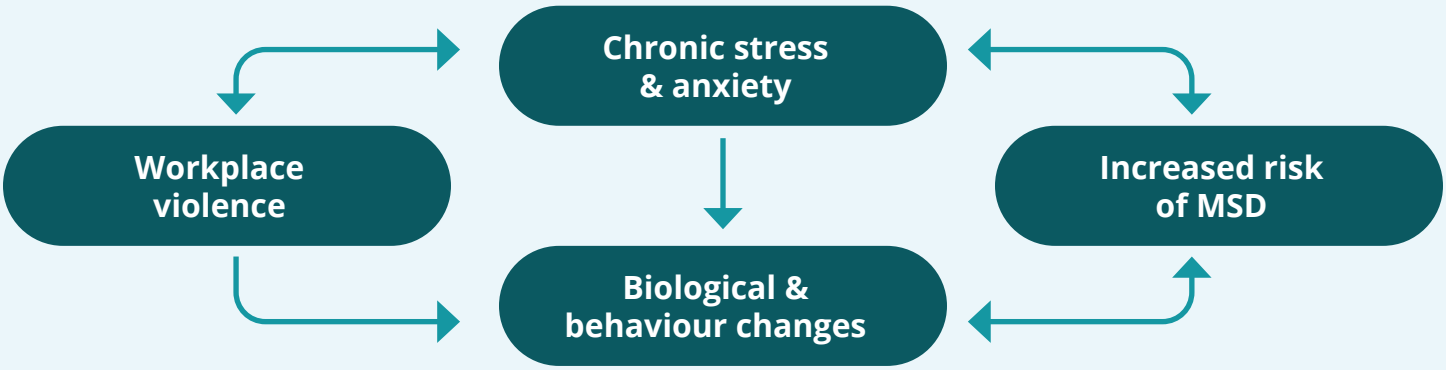
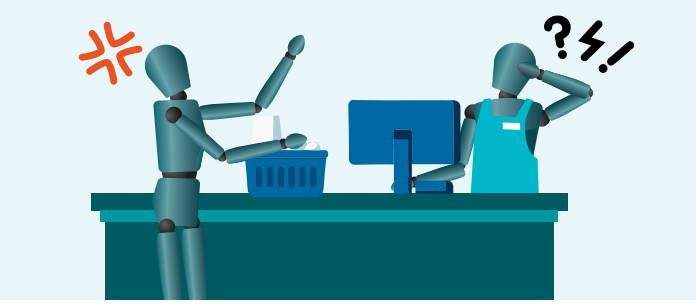
Workplace violence and MSD

How are workplace violence and MSD related?



Primary mechanisms

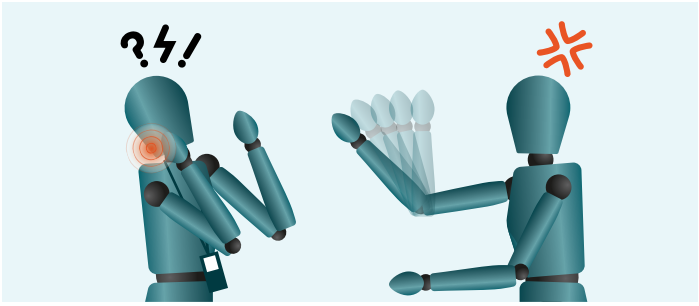


Chronic stress exposure

- Chronic or repeated exposure to physical or psychological violence can contribute to stress and anxiety, resulting in:
  - Delayed tissue healing
  - Reduced pain tolerance
  - Pain anticipation
- Chronic stress may develop due to:
  - Experiencing physical or emotional violence in the workplace (e.g., angry customers or coworkers)
  - Secondary exposure (e.g., witnessing violence) among other factors

Effects on posture

- At risk workers may adjust postures to avoid assault, contributing to awkward postures and/or movements



Direct physical injury

- Involvement in physical assault can cause immediate injury, that may result in or contribute to MSD (e.g., restraining an attacker, using defensive movements, and experiencing direct impact from the assault)

Stress Anger

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Workplace violence and MSD

Risk factors and protective factors for MSD and workplace violence

Protective factors

Access to accessible, blame-free reporting systems

Access to psychological support, employee assistance programs, etc.

Supportive and safe work environments can buffer the impacts of violence, reducing the risk for MSD when violence occurs

Use of participatory ergonomics to identify, assess and control MSD risk

- This evidence-based approach relies on worker participation and collaboration, which can also be used to reduce the risk of workplace violence

For more information on participatory ergonomics, refer to **Step 2: Facilitate and Encourage Workers' Participation** on the MSD Prevention Guideline.

Overlapping risk factors

- **Organizational factors:** directly influenced or controlled by the employer and related to how work is designed, organized, and managed. Examples of risk factors:
  - Inadequate staffing
  - Irregular or extended shift work
  - Night shifts
  - Low job control
  - Job insecurity
  - Lack of training and/or reporting procedures
- **Psychosocial factors:** interactions between cultural, social and psychological factors determined at or by the workplace that impact employees' responses to work and their work environment. Examples of risk factors:
  - Exposure to psychological violence and bullying
  - Acceptance of risk as "part of the job"
  - Job stress/burnout
  - Lack of perceived coworker, supervisor, or organizational support
  - Inadequate safety procedures
  - Poor organizational culture
  - Lack of psychological safety

Scan here for additional workplace violence resources

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