

Surf Park Business Review

Behind the Stoke: Pilot Research into Psychosocial Hazards in the Surf Park Industry

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Abstract

Background: The surf park industry is rapidly growing as a popular leisure and amusement sector, yet little is understood about the psychosocial

hazards facing both workers and organizations within this domain. This research aims to fill the void by investigating the current state of psychosocial hazards and their implications. Understanding current

industry norms regarding work and job design is crucial for safeguarding the well-being of workers and ensuring the long-term sustainability of surf park entities.

A pilot study engaged twenty-four participants collectively across Australia, United States and United Kingdom involving one to two quantitative surveys to assess their exposure and effects of psychosocial hazards in the workplace. The scope of analysis targeted middle management including executive leaders consisting of current and former workers to determine notable trends or patterns. Initial findings found that critical psychosocial hazards exist specific to job demands, lack of role clarity, inadequate reward and recognition. Australia is recognized to be the most severe in psychosocial risk exposures followed by the United States and United Kingdom.

Introduction

In the surf park industry, health and safety controls are often overlooked or considered to be extraneous as the subject can be perceived as detracting from the priority of revenue generation. Oversight of this kind poses challenges for leaders managing workforce growth and escalating operational demands. Navigating from conceptual design to operationalization necessitates strategic planning, appropriate workforce scaling, and effective resource allocation (Børke, 2016). This approach is crucial not only for accommodating inherent business growth but also for safeguarding the psychosocial well-being of the industry's workforce, pivotal to overall

business success. However, the absence of strategic planning, consideration, expertise and proper business scaling can fuel the manifestation of psychosocial hazards rooted within workplace culture. Such exposures specifically include high work demands, excessive work hours, low job control, lack of role clarity and bullying. Disregarding or failing to identify the causation of psychosocial hazards can lead to detrimental impacts on worker health and rob the business of long-term success and sustainability.

The rationale behind this body of research is to investigate the prevalence of psychosocial hazards within the surf park industry, identify potential exposures, and behaviors, and assess their impact on current and former workers. By conducting research in this domain, the aim is to understand the degree of systemic issues and challenges confronting the industry as a whole, thereby raising awareness for those who hold legal obligations/duties across various jurisdictions. Addressing these hazards is crucial for promoting safer workplaces, achieving a sustainable long-term workforce and promoting improved health outcomes for those who work within the industry.

Limitations

A notable limitation of this research is the sample size, consisting of only eight participants across three geographic locations. In addition, cultural attitudes and customs may influence participant responses. Furthermore, the extreme sensitivity of the subject matter necessitated stringent measures to protect the

identity of the participants, particularly those who are currently employed in the surf park industry. Protective measures and concerns may have influenced the openness and integrity of the responses, as participants may have been cautious about sharing their experiences despite assurances of confidentiality. Consequently, while the study provides valuable insights into the psychosocial hazards specific to behavior, exposure, and personal impact within the industry, the findings should be interpreted with caution, and further research with a larger and more diverse sample is recommended to validate and expand upon these initial results.

Background and Meaning of Psychosocial Hazards

The introduction of psychosocial hazards into Australian work health and safety law from 2018 was prompted by the findings of the 'Boland Review'. Formally known as the 'Review of the model Work Health and Safety laws', led by Marie Boland (2018). The report highlighted the need to explicitly address psychosocial risks within the framework of workplace health and safety regulations. The report recommended integrating psychosocial hazards more clearly into existing laws to ensure comprehensive protection for workers' mental health and well-being. As a result, subsequent legislative amendments, development of guidelines and model codes of practice incorporated these recommendations, promoting a more holistic approach to workplace safety in Australia.

The definition of a psychosocial hazard(s) defined by Safe Work Australia (2022) is "anything that could cause psychological harm (e.g. harm someone's mental health)". Commonly recognized hazards specific to psychosocial hazards include but are not limited to:

- Job Demands
- Low Job Control
- Poor support
- Lack of Role Clarity
- Poor Organizational Change Management
- Inadequate Reward and Recognition
- Poor Organisational Justice
- Traumatic Events or Material
- Remote or Isolated Work
- Poor Physical Environment
- Violence and Aggression
Bullying Harassment (Inc. Sexual and Gender-Based Harassment)
- Conflict or Poor Workplace Relations and Interactions

Psychosocial safety in the workplace encompasses the identification and management of risks that can adversely affect workers' mental and emotional well-being. The impact of psychosocial hazards is typically assessed through three key dimensions of duration, frequency, and severity. Duration refers to how long a worker is exposed to a particular hazard, frequency denotes how often the exposure occurs (repeated occurrences), and severity measures the intensity or seriousness of the exposure's effects (Manapragads et al., 2019). Dependant on these dimensions, the mental impact upon an individual's health can lead to significant adverse health outcomes including chronic stress, anxiety, depression and burnout. In addition,

recent research highlights the physical effects including musculoskeletal injuries, chronic disease or fatigue related injuries.

Researching Methodology

The research methodology employed in this study consisted of a quantitative survey designed to measure various psychosocial hazards, specifically focusing on aspects of behavior, exposure, and personal impact. To ensure a comprehensive understanding of these hazards, the study sample comprised of eight participants across each geographic location including Australia, the United States, and the United Kingdom.

Recognizing the sensitivity of the subject matter and the potential for biases, the participants were evenly divided into two distinct groups across each geographic location. The first group consisted of four workers who currently work with a surf park entity, whilst the second group included four former workers who had previously worked for a surf park entity within the past five years. This deliberate separation aimed to capture a broad spectrum of experiences and insights, thereby enhancing the depth, reliability and credibility of the findings.

Additionally, the survey incorporated a six-point Likert scale to quantify participants' experiences toward various psychosocial hazards. This scale facilitated a structured yet nuanced assessment of subjective experiences, complementing the data with quantifiable measures against geographical locations,

current and former work groups to enrich findings. The design of the survey and data collection enabled an in-depth exploration of the psychosocial hazards experienced by participants, providing valuable contextual information that otherwise may be overlooked.

Measurement

In detail, the survey was designed into two parts. The first element of the survey was designed to collect data specific to psychosocial hazards related to work environment factors. Whereas the second element of the survey sought to capture organizational factors. The justification to categorise and separate core psychosocial exposures across these two elements was to dissect respective impacts on outcomes such as job satisfaction, productivity, and employee well-being. This separation promoted clarity and precision during data collection and analysis, providing the ability to uncover nuanced interactions within each category. The below 'Impact Description Matrix' scale was designed reflecting a Likert scale to measure participant responses with calculated risk exposures. The matrix is represented in Figure 1.

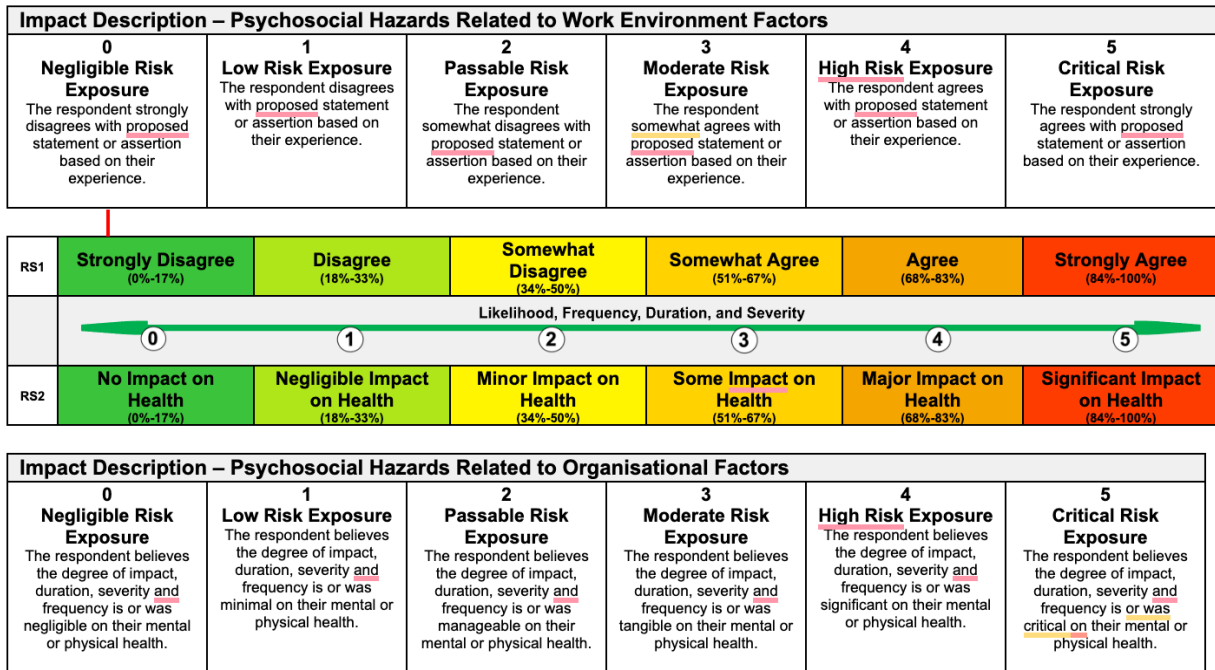


Fig. 1: Impact Description Matrix

Results

The study comprised twenty-four participants, with Australia showing the highest prevalence of psychosocial hazards followed by the United States and the United Kingdom. Risk exposure scores (percentages) were calculated based on participant responses for each type of psychosocial hazard. Tables 1 and 2 present the distribution of risk exposure percentages for the identified hazards across each category.

Table 1: Psychosocial Hazards Related to Work Environment Factors

Question Elements		Job Demands	Low Job Control	Lack of Role Clarity	Poor Support	Inadequate Reward and Recognition	Poor Organisational Justice	Conflict or Poor Workplace Relations and Interactions
Active Workers	Australia	90% Critical Risk Exposure	75% High Risk Exposure	90% Critical Risk Exposure	85% Critical Risk Exposure	95% Critical Risk Exposure	75% High Risk Exposure	65% Moderate Risk Exposure
	United Kingdom	60% Moderate Risk Exposure	60% Moderate Risk Exposure	45% Passable Risk Exposure	50% Passable Risk Exposure	55% Moderate Risk Exposure	45% Passable Risk Exposure	50% Passable Risk Exposure
	United States	85% Critical Risk Exposure	60% Moderate Risk Exposure	85% Critical Risk Exposure	60% Moderate Risk Exposure	50% Passable Risk Exposure	55% Moderate Risk Exposure	50% Passable Risk Exposure
Former Workers	Australia	95% Critical Risk Exposure	80% High Risk Exposure	95% Critical Risk Exposure	90% Critical Risk Exposure	85% Critical Risk Exposure	90% Critical Risk Exposure	90% Critical Risk Exposure
	United Kingdom	60% Moderate Risk Exposure	60% Moderate Risk Exposure	50% Passable Risk Exposure	55% Moderate Risk Exposure	55% Moderate Risk Exposure	45% Passable Risk Exposure	50% Passable Risk Exposure
	United States	85% Critical Risk Exposure	65% Moderate Risk Exposure	85% Critical Risk Exposure	65% Moderate Risk Exposure	55% Moderate Risk Exposure	55% Moderate Risk Exposure	70% High Risk Exposure

Table 2: Psychosocial Hazards Related to Organisational Factors

Question Elements		Poor Organisational Change Management	Traumatic Events or Materials	Remote or Isolated Work	Poor Physical Environment	Violence and Aggression	Bullying	Harassment
Active Workers	Australia	40% Passable Risk Exposure	85% Critical Risk Exposure	20% Low Risk Exposure	45% Passable Risk Exposure	95% Critical Risk Exposure	70% High Risk Exposure	65% Moderate Risk Exposure
	United Kingdom	35% Passable Risk Exposure	65% Moderate Risk Exposure	30% Low Risk Exposure	20% Low Risk Exposure	35% Passable Risk Exposure	45% Passable Risk Exposure	30% Low Risk Exposure
	United States	65% Moderate Risk Exposure	30% Low Risk Exposure	0.5% Negligible Risk Exposure	30% Low Risk Exposure	50% Passable Risk Exposure	55% Moderate Risk Exposure	50% Passable Risk Exposure
Former Workers	Australia	50% Passable Risk Exposure	80% High Risk Exposure	10% Negligible Risk Exposure	30% Low Risk Exposure	50% Passable Risk Exposure	85% Critical Risk Exposure	60% Moderate Risk Exposure
	United Kingdom	40% Passable Risk Exposure	45% Passable Risk Exposure	20% Low Risk Exposure	15% Negligible Risk Exposure	35% Passable Risk Exposure	45% Passable Risk Exposure	50% Passable Risk Exposure
	United States	85% Critical Risk Exposure	30% Low Risk Exposure	10% Negligible Risk Exposure	40% Passable Risk Exposure	55% Moderate Risk Exposure	55% Moderate Risk Exposure	70% High Risk Exposure

Extension of Survey Questions (Former Workers)

Given the initial survey findings on psychosocial hazards associated with workplace factors (Table 1), further investigation was necessary to explore why former workers reported higher risk exposure ratings compared to current workers. The differences in results promoted the inclusion of ten additional questions aimed at understanding possible underlying factors contributing to this variant. Thus, supplementary questions only

involving former workers was justified in order to understand and clarify observed nuances identified during initial data collection.

The survey questions specifically targeted the exiting stage the workers tenure and post-employment with a surf park entity. The experience of transitioning out from a surf park entity could make a worker more aware of the behaviors and risk exposures in their previous workplace and be more willing to share their experiences to improve occupational safety. Therefore, the inclusion of these additional questions was essential to gain greater depth in understanding

survey findings, leveraging the experiences of former workers to enrich the analysis and recommendations for mitigating psychosocial hazards in the workplace.

Table 3: Factors Contributing to Increased Psychosocial Hazards Among Former Workers

Question Elements		Accused of Malicious Claims, Misconduct or Other Allegations	Sought Independent Legal Advice (Inc. Safety Regulator, Fair Work/ Fair Labour)	Engaged with Legal Services	Received Post Employment Communications	Deterioration of Conflict or Poor Workplace Relations and Interactions (Exiting/Post Employment)
Active Workers	Australia	95% Critical Risk Exposure	90% Critical Risk Exposure	100% Critical Risk Exposure	90% Critical Risk Exposure	75% High Risk Exposure
	United Kingdom	35% Passable Risk Exposure	55% Moderate Risk Exposure	65% Moderate Risk Exposure	50% Passable Risk Exposure	20% Low Risk Exposure
	United States	80% High Risk Exposure	20% Low Risk Exposure	100% Critical Risk Exposure	50% Passable Risk Exposure	80% High Risk Exposure

Findings

The primary survey results involving current and former workers measuring both work environment and organizational factors offer valuable insights into the degree of psychosocial hazards experienced across the industry with a high degree of consistency across both groups. Key themes emerged from survey results consisting of high job demands, insufficient role clarity, poor support and legal intervention. In addition, a secondary survey undertaken by only former workers sought to understand lived experiences and management of these hazards towards the end of their employment journey uncovering strong correlations, suggesting systemic issues facing workers in the surf park industry.

Unsustainable Job Demands

The results highlighted that in Australia and the United States, workers currently in the industry report high levels of job demands with critical

risk exposures ranging from 85% to 90%. The nature of these results indicates a significant portion of workers in these regions perceive their job demands as critically high, which can lead to both adverse mental and physical health conditions (Schaufeli & Taris, 2013). Research undertaken by Žutautienė et al., (2020) highlight these effects to include cardiovascular, musculoskeletal, and psychiatric diseases. More notable, research by Nilsen et al., (2014) indicated that high job demands are linked to a higher likelihood of serious health problems, especially among women.

Low Role Clarity Issues

The results equally highlighted a correlation between job demands and low job control, raising notable concerns regarding role clarity issues. In both Australia and the United States, the prevalence of these risks ranged from 85% to 90%. Notably, the United Kingdom reported comparatively lower levels of risk exposure, suggesting a less pronounced concern with role clarity issues in the industry by comparison. Psychosocial hazards,

such as those related to role clarity, are widely acknowledged as significant risk exposures in the workplace (Baç & Ekmekçi, 2021). When employees experience low role clarity, characterized by ambiguity in their responsibilities, it can have profound effects on their job performance and overall job satisfaction. These hazards can lead to psychological or physical harm due to the organizational and social dynamics within the workplace (Ekeke, 2024).

Poor Support, Conflicts and Relations

Across all three countries, concerns related to organizational interactions were prevalent among both current and former workers. Two significant issues that emerged across various countries were inadequate support and recognition, as well as conflict and strained workplace relations. Former employees in Australia and the United States exhibit high risk exposures related to organizational justice deficits and insufficient reward and recognition systems, leading to heightened dissatisfaction and reduced well-being among workers (Rismayadi, 2024). Additionally, conflict and strained workplace relations pose widespread risks, particularly evident in Australia, where both current and former employees report substantial risk exposures, potentially manifesting a toxic work environment that can negatively impact productivity and employee morale (Kuriakose et al., 2019).

Navigating Accusatory Claims Arising from

Departure and Post Employment

Across the industry, a substantial proportion of former workers in Australia (95%), the United States (80%), and the United Kingdom (35%) encountered series of accusations of malicious claims, alleged misconduct, or other allegations. Furthermore, many former workers engaged in independent legal services during their final weeks of tenure, including post-employment. In order to understand and explain the rationale of this behavior can be traced back to the inherent risk exposures faced by current workers. In addition, the comparison of results between current and former workers indicates several strong correlations of psychosocial hazards specific to the work environment (Table 1). Thus, it is no surprise that given the high to critical risk exposures experienced within the industry, former workers initiate and engage in legal services. Despite limitations, these findings cannot be disregarded, as they uncover systemic issues within the cultural dynamics of surf park entities that impact workers' well-being. Moreover, the results necessitate further investigation into the recurrent targeting of former workers with accusatory claims, implying that such behavior may likely be anticipated given the inherent psychosocial risks within workplace settings which is demonstrated by the results of current workers in the initial survey results.

Recommendations

Psychosocial hazards in the workplace can bear significant impacts on both workers and employers. Workers

exposed to psychosocial hazards, such as workplace conflict, high workload, and lack of support, are vulnerable to experiencing adverse effects on their physical health, mental well-being, and work engagement (Manapragada et al., 2019). The implications for workplaces that possess psychosocial hazards, experience higher levels of absenteeism, elevated employee turnover rates, diminished productivity, and an increased occurrence of accidents (Jatmiko, 2024).

The legislative approach in Australia, assigns the responsibility for managing risks upon officers and persons conducting a business or undertaking, with codes of practices detailing the functions of senior executives involving chief executive officers and board of directors (Safe Work Australia, 2023). Duties prescribed under federal and state laws serves as a primary function to meet compliance with relevant health and safety law and preventing corporate contraventions (Zhou, 2019). Further outlining the importance of leadership roles and organizational culture in maximizing safety outcomes, highlighting the importance of executive leadership in influencing workforce safety behaviors (Flin et al., 2002).

Given the survey results, it is evident that there is a need to apply an appropriate benchmark in order to enhance workers health and business performance across surf park entities. An example of an appropriate benchmark is the International Standards Organisation (ISO) 45003 – Management of Psychosocial Risks. The standard provides guidelines for managing psychosocial risks within the workplace and communicates the importance of addressing these

hazards in conjunction with health and safety management systems (Schulte et al., 2022). Incorporating psychosocial risk management into broader safety management systems involving risk assessment and preventative actions, is crucial for effectively preventing and managing psychosocial risk exposures.

The research findings indicate that high to critical psychosocial hazards in the workplace may not be adequately managed by key leadership alone, given the inherent risk exposure ratings. Consequently, there arises a necessity and justification for external facilitation and support to effectively address these challenges within a workplace. Given the sensitivity and complex nature of the issue, a holistic approach is advantageous to address individual health determinants, workplace support systems, and cultural influences to mitigate risks and promote well-being (Hurtado et al., 2015). Furthermore, research undertaken by Cameron et al. (2013) identified that involving external specialists can lead to improved safety performance and safety culture within workplaces as the engagement and interactions of specialists hold a greater degree of influence in promoting safety practices and allocating resources when reporting to executive leaders. Additionally, external specialists can help in building organizational capabilities, especially in complex projects, by providing innovative solutions and guidance to leaders (Hu et al., 2022).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the result of this study scratches the surface of the degree of psychosocial hazards across the surf park industry. The findings

axiomatically demonstrate the need for greater psychosocial risk management controls to protect worker health and ensure sustainable long-term business performance across surf park entities. Key findings demonstrate pervasive issues such as high job demands, role clarity and deficiencies in support and recognition with higher risk exposures in Australia and the United States. The paper discusses the legislative framework specific to psychosocial risks and the application of standards like ISO 45003, serving as a benchmark in fostering a safer and improved work environment.

Additionally, based on the participant responses, the level of risk exposures indicate that current leadership and cultural practices may not adequately address high to critical psychosocial hazards, warranting the value proposition of the engagement of specialist consultants to provide expert guidance and support resulting in enhancing safety culture and operational effectiveness. The complexities extend to navigating workplace disputes and post-employment issues further emphasise the need for proactive management strategies and supportive exit processes within surf park entities. Future research should aim to expand on these findings with larger and more diverse samples to validate and extend these initial insights, ultimately contributing to improved workplace health and safety practices across the industry.

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