

This isn't working...

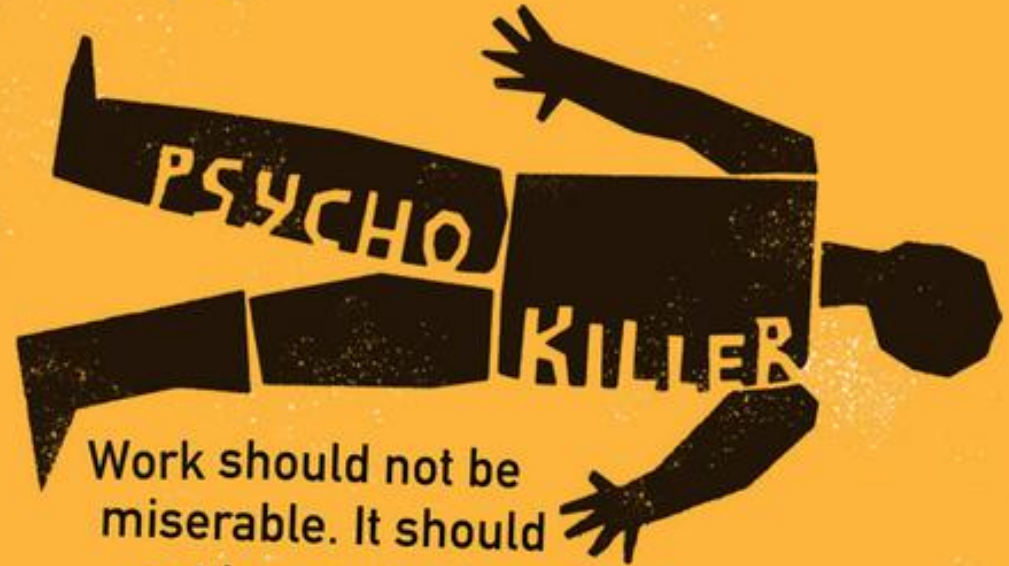
Why it takes strong, active unions to reverse the epidemic of psychosocial harm at work



ITUC CSI IGB

Rory O'Neill. www.ituc-csi.org

International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC)



Work should not be miserable. It should not leave you desperate.

But bad jobs are the reality for too many workers. Too much work for too little pay. Too much hassle and too little support.

Work stress is causing life-threatening heart disease, sickness and depression, even driving some to suicide.

It is lawless out there...

Two-thirds of countries have no preventive safety laws on psychosocial hazards at work.

In just about all cases, you are better protected from banging your head than losing your mind.

PROTECTION MUST BE A RIGHT

Too many countries still fail to recognise psychosocial risks properly or prevent them effectively. Prevention must be a legal obligation.



The job makes you sick

Psychosocial hazards at work – including long hours, job insecurity, and a lack of control over what we do – are breaking our bodies and our minds, including but not limited to:

Depression. Anxiety. Burnout. Sleep disturbance and fatigue. Cognitive decline. Suicidal behaviour and suicide. PTSD. Moral injury/distress.

Psychological suffering from fear of disease after dangerous exposures. Unhealthy behaviours. Cardiovascular diseases. Metabolic disorders. Cancer. Musculoskeletal disorders. Reproductive problems. Injuries. Neurotoxic effects.

DESPAIR IS NOT A PERSONAL FAILURE

Work-related stress is linked to more than 10% of heart disease, depression and suicides. When work harms health, the system — not the worker — must change.





What's the point?

Work-related suicides are not reportable.
They are not counted.
They are not a workplace prevention priority.

They should be. Suicides caused by bad jobs are a real and growing problem at work.

Don't despair. Say no more work suicides, no to desperately depressing work.

www.hazards.org/suicide

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NEW TECHNOLOGY, NEW PRESSURES

Algorithmic control, surveillance and platform work are intensifying pressure and reducing autonomy, while climate impacts are adding new layers of stress for workers.

“The right to a safe and healthy working environment will not be achieved by simply relying on employers becoming more benevolent or health and safety regulators more diligent. It is only through the respect and promotion of a rights-based approach that illness, injury, and death will ultimately be eliminated from the world of work...

“This is no more evident than in the current battle of our movement globally to advance and implement strengthened rights to mentally safe and healthy work.”

Denise Vesper, Michael J. Zickar, Liam O'Brien, Rory O'Neill, Maureen F. Dollard, Kevin Flynn, Keaton A. Fletcher, Kendall Stephenson, Timo Ahr, Alexander Jost, Kaylee Somerville & Julian Barling. [Occupational Health and Labor Unions](#), Occupational Health Science, Volume 9, pages 835–864, (2025)

BAD JOBS MAKE PEOPLE SICK

Around 1 in 5 workers experience burnout. Low pay, insecurity and excessive workloads are driving a global mental health crisis at work.

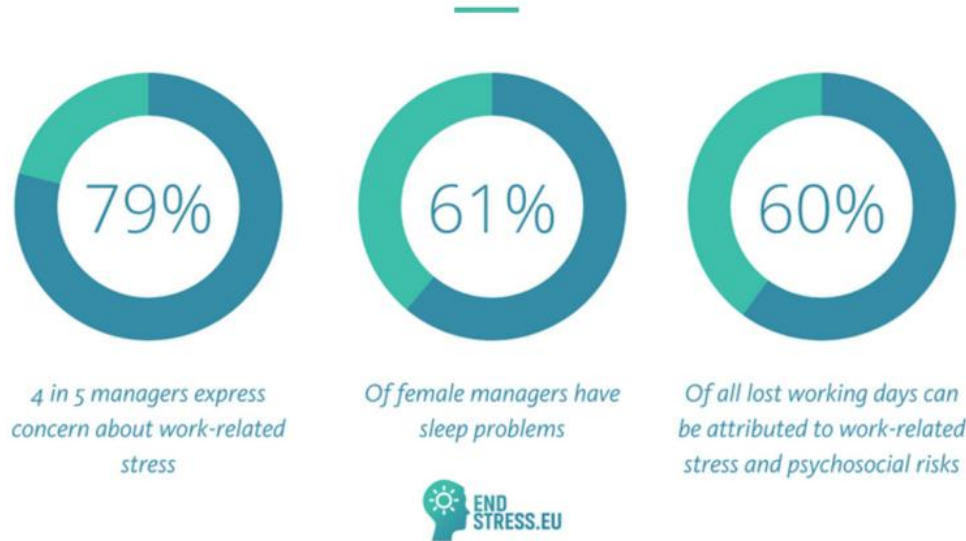




- A National, Union-led workplace mental health program
- Focused on prevention and early intervention, not treatment
- Designed to address psychosocial hazards at a systems level (not individual resilience)
- Aimed at building capability across workplaces — workers, HSRs, delegates, unions and leaders
- Delivered through structured, modular training and tools
- Grounded in evidence and developed with researchers and unions
- Intended to support unions to organise around psychosocial hazards and to integrate with broader union campaigns

[Mind Your Head checklist for union health and safety reps](https://www.mindyourhead.org.au/) to help them conduct risk assessments in their workplaces. <https://www.mindyourhead.org.au/>

ETUC/Eurocadres campaign moves forward



European Parliament Report 2026/2023(INL): Psychosocial risks, stress and mental health at work. [The full legislative initiative report](#) was adopted by the European Parliament on 6 October 2026. www.endstress.eu

- MEPs agreed an EU directive should ensure:
- Employers carry out regular **psychosocial risk assessments** to evaluate factors such as **excessive workload** and **high work intensity** and **adopt action plans**.
 - Significant **restructuring or reorganisation**, such as **teleworking** arrangements or the introduction of **automated decision-making** and **automated monitoring systems**, should be subject to a prior **psychosocial risk assessment in cooperation with workers and their representatives**.
 - Employers should ensure that the introduction of **algorithmic management systems** does not impose **excessive burden or monitoring of workers**, and there must always be **human oversight**. Workers have the **right to disconnect** from work.

SHOYA YOSHIDA
GENERAL SECRETARY, ITUC AP



DR. HIDAYAT GREENFIELD
IUF ASIA / PACIFIC REGIONAL SECRETARY

PSYCHOSOCIAL RISKS ARISE FROM HOW WORK IS DESIGNED, ORGANISED, & MANAGED



EXAMPLES OF PSYCHOSOCIAL HAZARDS AFFECTING WORKERS' MENTAL HEALTH

- 1. PRECARIOUS EMPLOYMENT**
CONTINUOUS UNCERTAINTY & INSECURITY HAVE A DEVASTATING IMPACT ON WORKERS' MENTAL HEALTH & WELLBEING.
- 2. PIECE-RATE WAGES, QUOTAS & PERFORMANCE TARGETS**
FAILURE TO MEET QUOTAS MEANS POVERTY WAGES & DEBT
- 3. CONTINUOUS RESTRUCTURING**
CREATES CONTINUOUS ANXIETY, OR "JOB ANXIETY"
- 4. BEHAVIOUR-BASED SAFETY (BBS)**
SHIFTS RESPONSIBILITY FOR SAFETY ONTO WORKERS INSTEAD OF ADDRESSING WORKPLACE CONDITIONS & EMPLOYER ACCOUNTABILITY
- 5. AUTOMATION, DIGITALISATION & NEW TECHNOLOGIES**
ALGORITHMS DECIDE JOBS, TARGETS & EARNINGS WITHOUT TRANSPARENCY OR ACCOUNTABILITY

CHRISTINE AGAN,
BPO INDUSTRY EMPLOYEES' NETWORK (BIEN), PHILIPPINES

PSYCHOSOCIAL HARM IN CONTENT MODERATION



UNION ACTION

- ORGANISE WORKERS TO FIGHT PSYCHOSOCIAL HARM
- DEMAND TRANSPARENCY & ACCOUNTABILITY
- USE COLLECTIVE BARGAINING TO SHAPE WORKPLACE CHANGES
- BUILD COLLECTIVE BOTTOM-UP SOLUTIONS & ACTIONS TO PROTECT WORKERS

ANISHA BAGBAN,
SEWA, INDIA

INFORMAL WORKERS' CHALLENGES & RIGHTS



CAROLYN DUNBAR,
VICTORIAN TRADES HALL COUNCIL, AUSTRALIA

AUSTRALIAN WORKPLACE GENDER VIOLENCE INITIATIVES



BREAKOUT DISCUSSION

WHAT GOVERNMENTS SHOULD DO:

- RECOGNISE IMPACTS OF PSYCHOSOCIAL HAZARDS AS OCCUPATIONAL ILLNESS / INJURIES
- RATIFY ILO CONVENTION NOS 155 AND 187
- STRENGTHEN LEGAL PROTECTION
- ENSURE SAFE REPORTING MECHANISMS, PROTECTING WORKERS FROM RETALIATION
- EXTEND LABOUR PROTECTIONS TO BPO & PLATFORM WORKERS

WHAT UNIONS ARE DOING:

- BUILDING THE CAPACITY OF WOMEN OSH REPRESENTATIVES
- SUPPORTING BY NEGOTIATING WAYS TO ADDRESS PSYCHOSOCIAL HAZARDS IN THE CBA
- ENSURE WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION IN LEADERSHIP & COLLECTIVE BARGAINING
- CONNECTING WORKERS AFFECTED BY SIMILAR PSYCHOSOCIAL RISKS

Psychosocial Risks at Work:
Organising For Workers' Safety and Health



Union presence ‘vital’

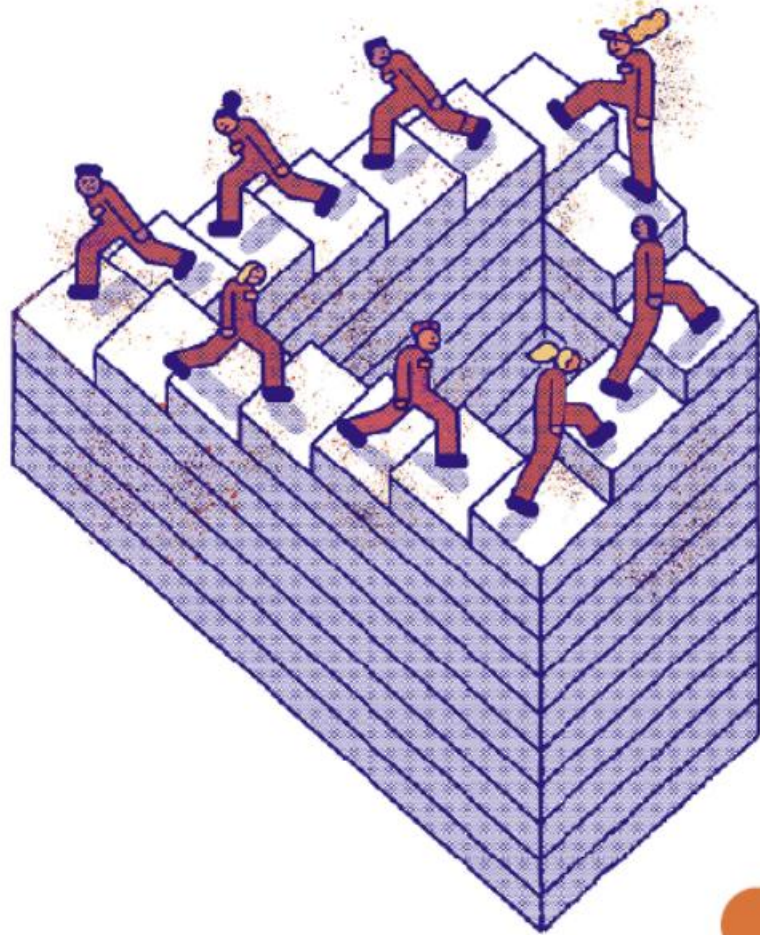
A study involving 45 countries, including Ireland, found ‘high union density’ was the single biggest factor in securing a better psychosocial safety climate (PSC) at work. It concluded that a union presence and ‘collective action’ was ‘vital’, at both the national policy and the workplace level. A good national safety policy came second.

Rachael E Potter and others, *National Policy Index (NPI) for worker mental health and its relationship with enterprise psychosocial safety climate*, [Safety Science, Volume 17, April 2024](#), 106428. April 2024

COLLECTIVE ACTION PROTECTS LIVES

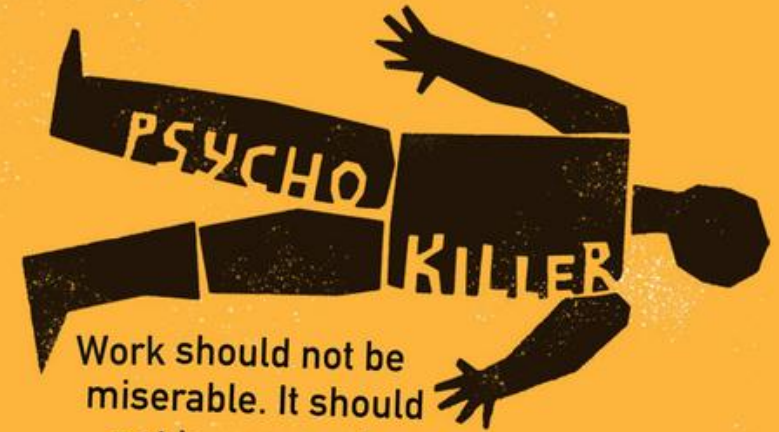
Where workers have a collective voice, risks are reduced and conditions improve. Strong unions are essential to making work safer.





TACKLING PSYCHOSOCIAL RISKS AT WORK:

HOW WORK STRESSES AND STRAINS CAN KILL
WORKERS AND HOW UNIONS CAN SAVE THEM



Work should not be miserable. It should not leave you desperate.

But bad jobs are the reality for too many workers. Too much work for too little pay. Too much hassle and too little support.

Work stress is causing life-threatening heart disease, sickness and depression, even driving some to suicide.

This isn't working.

Strong unions are the single most 'vital' factor in fighting off psychosocial hazards at work - fact.

Get support. Get active. Get organised!



PREVENTING PSYCHOSOCIAL RISKS STARTS WITH RIGHTS, REGULATION AND WORKER VOICE.

SCAN THE QR CODE TO READ THE
FULL REPORT AND TAKE ACTION



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www.ituc-csi.org