

How can psychosocial hazards impact employee wellbeing?

Insights from our survey of 2,000 employees

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Disclaimer

This document is provided for informative purposes only and should not be relied upon as professional advice. Any views expressed within are not necessarily reflective of Sonder's policies and views. We recommend seeking further advice before taking any action based on issues addressed within this guide.

Introduction

This report serves as a pulse check of the impact of psychosocial hazards on employee wellbeing in Australian workplaces.

The comprehensive data set comes from a survey of 2,000 employees across various industries, who each work a minimum of 20 hours per week.

The results reveal some meaningful insights and demonstrate the connection between psychosocial hazards, employee wellbeing, and workplace performance.

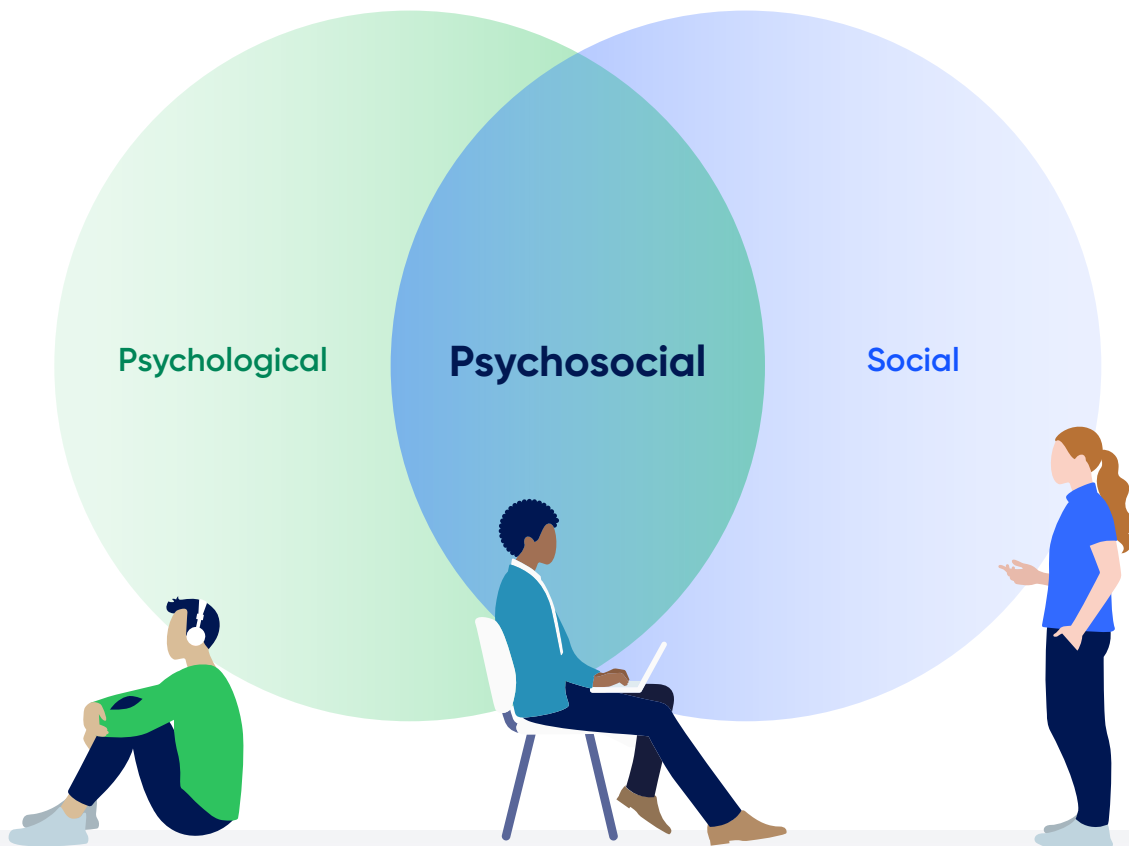
Source: October 2022 McGregor Tan survey (commissioned by Sonder).

Industries: Professional, scientific, and technical services (450); retail/wholesale trade (302); financial and insurance services (300); health care and social assistance (300); education and training (260); civil service/local government/social services (194); transportation/distribution (94); utilities (electricity, gas, water) (52); property/real estate (37); and media (11).

What is psychosocial?

Psychosocial means having both psychological and social aspects.

In the workplace context, psychosocial factors are characteristics of work that can influence an employee psychologically and/or socially and can have a positive or negative influence on their physical and mental wellbeing.¹



¹ International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, The nature and measurement of work-related stress: theory and practice

What are psychosocial hazards?

Psychosocial factors become psychosocial hazards when they have the potential to cause psychological or physical harm.²

The potential of these hazards occurring, and the likelihood they will contribute negatively to individual (health, safety, and wellbeing) outcomes and organisational (performance and sustainability) outcomes, is known as psychosocial risk.³

According to Safe Work Australia, “Some hazards may not create psychosocial risks

on their own but may do so if combined with other hazards. For example, when workloads are high, the risk may increase if workers cannot take breaks or there is no one around to help. Some hazards may only create risks on their own when severe.”⁴

Safe Work Australia’s Code of Practice, Managing psychosocial hazards at work identifies the following 14 psychosocial hazards:⁵

Psychosocial hazards



² Comcare ³ International Organization for Standardization, Work-Related Psychosocial Risks: Key Definitions and an Overview of the Policy Context in Europe ⁴ Safe Work Australia ⁵ Comcare

How can psychosocial hazards impact employee wellbeing?

Psychosocial hazards can affect an employee's psychological response to their work and workplace conditions. This can result in poor health, poor health behaviours, reduced productivity, absences from work, and/or attrition.⁶

Psychosocial hazards typically occur when there is a mismatch between job supports (such as leadership support, co-worker support, job control, skill-matching, role clarity, decision autonomy, recovery

time allowed between tasks, and reward and recognition) and job demands (mental, emotional, and physical) - which can negatively impact employee wellbeing and lead to, or exacerbate, ill health or injury.

Poor health

- High stress
- Fatigue
- Burnout
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Diabetes
- Sleep disorders
- Eating disorders
- Musculoskeletal disorders
- Cardiovascular disease

Poor health behaviours

- Poor diet
- Smoking
- Aggression
- Substance misuse
- Withdrawal from social activities
- Low levels of physical activity
- Reduced participation at work
- Failing to show up for work
- Care-seeking behaviours
- Lack of adherence to prescribed medication

⁶ International Organization for Standardization. The nature and measurement of work-related stress: theory and practice

Survey insights



INSIGHT 1

Poor leadership support has the largest impact on employee work performance

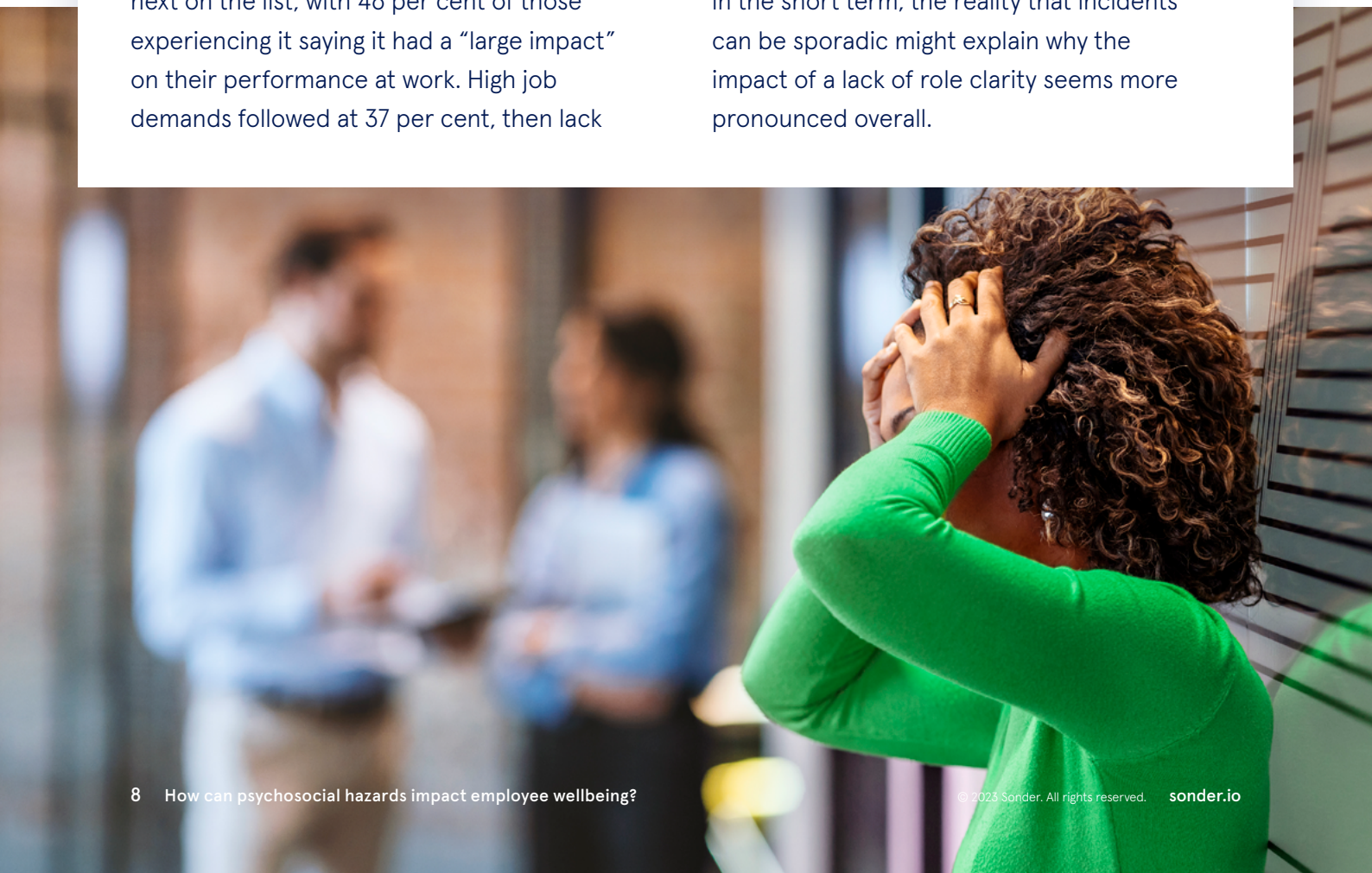
Of all 16 experiences listed in the survey, employees reported that poor leadership support has the largest impact on work performance.

Forty-seven per cent of the employees who had experienced poor leadership support said it had a “large impact”, 33 per cent said it had a “moderate impact”, and only three per cent said it had “no impact”.

Workplace bullying or harassment was next on the list, with 46 per cent of those experiencing it saying it had a “large impact” on their performance at work. High job demands followed at 37 per cent, then lack

of role clarity at 35 per cent, and workplace aggression at 34 per cent.

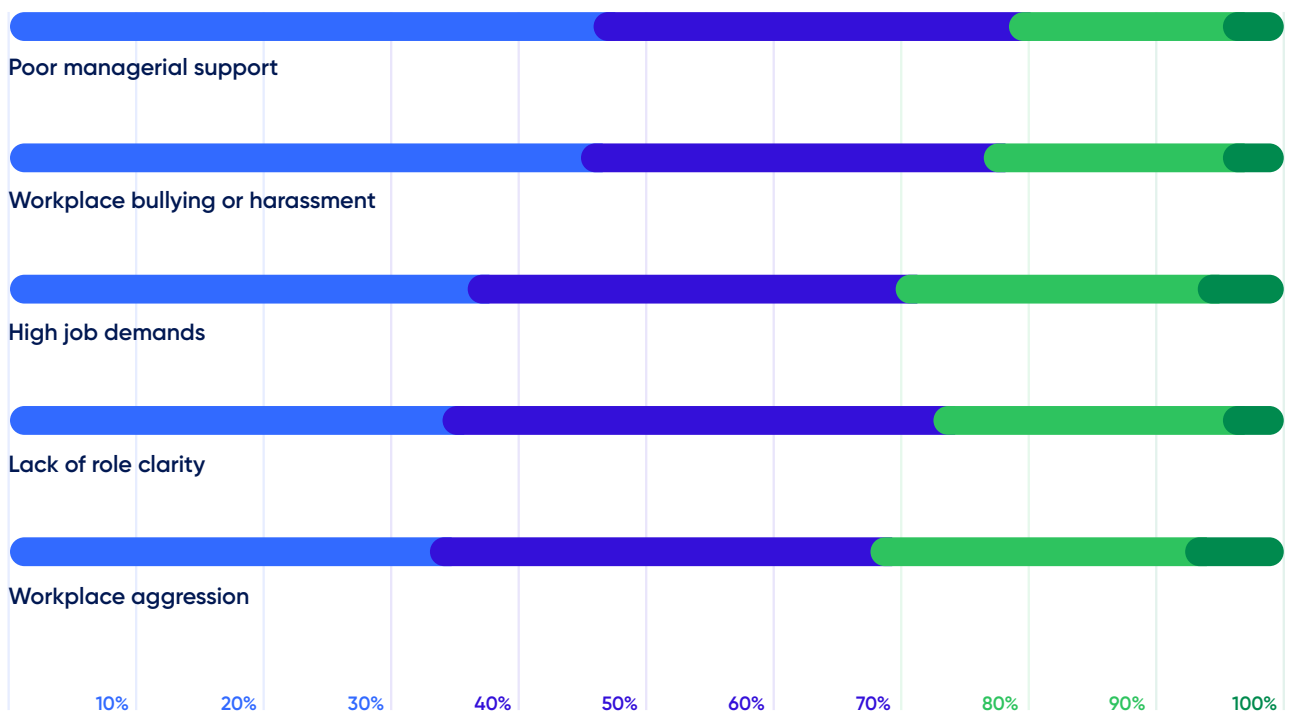
Why do the results show that a lack of role clarity has a larger impact than workplace aggression? We suspect that while workplace aggression may have a larger negative impact in the short term, the reality that incidents can be sporadic might explain why the impact of a lack of role clarity seems more pronounced overall.



Impact on work performance

Psychosocial hazard

● Large impact ● Moderate impact ● Slight impact ● No impact



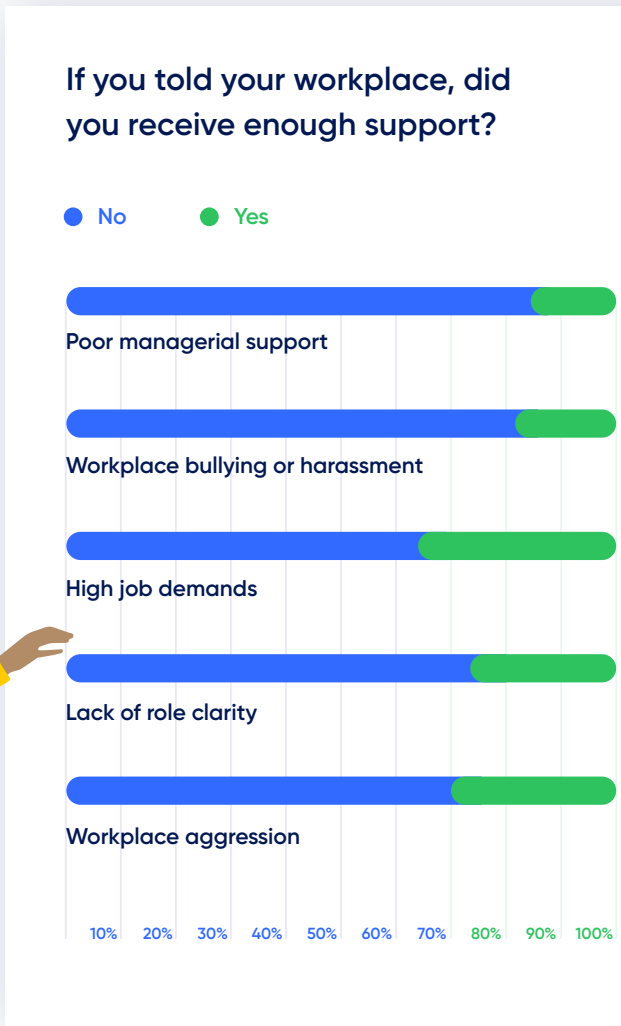
INSIGHT 2

Lack of workplace support means employee needs are not being met

Sadly, most employees are not receiving enough support when they need it the most.

Of those who experienced poor leadership support, 85 per cent (of those who told their workplace) said they did not receive enough support. Workplace bullying or harassment came in at 82 per cent. That's a lot of people being affected by psychosocial hazards and not receiving the support they need from their workplace.

Interestingly, our data showed that more women spoke up than men. Across the five most common psychosocial hazards experienced, 89 per cent of women told someone (either at home or at work) compared to 82 per cent of men.



INSIGHT 3

Lower wellbeing scores are reported by employees who experience psychosocial hazards

When analysing the individual wellbeing scores of those who experienced psychosocial hazards, there is a clear correlation between psychosocial hazards and reduced employee wellbeing.

The average wellbeing score for employees who experienced workplace bullying or harassment was almost 50 per cent lower than the general cohort. For those who experienced workplace aggression, the figure was 30 per cent lower than the general cohort.

These numbers represent significant reductions in employee wellbeing and shine a spotlight on the importance of addressing psychosocial hazards early and effectively.



What was the average wellbeing score?

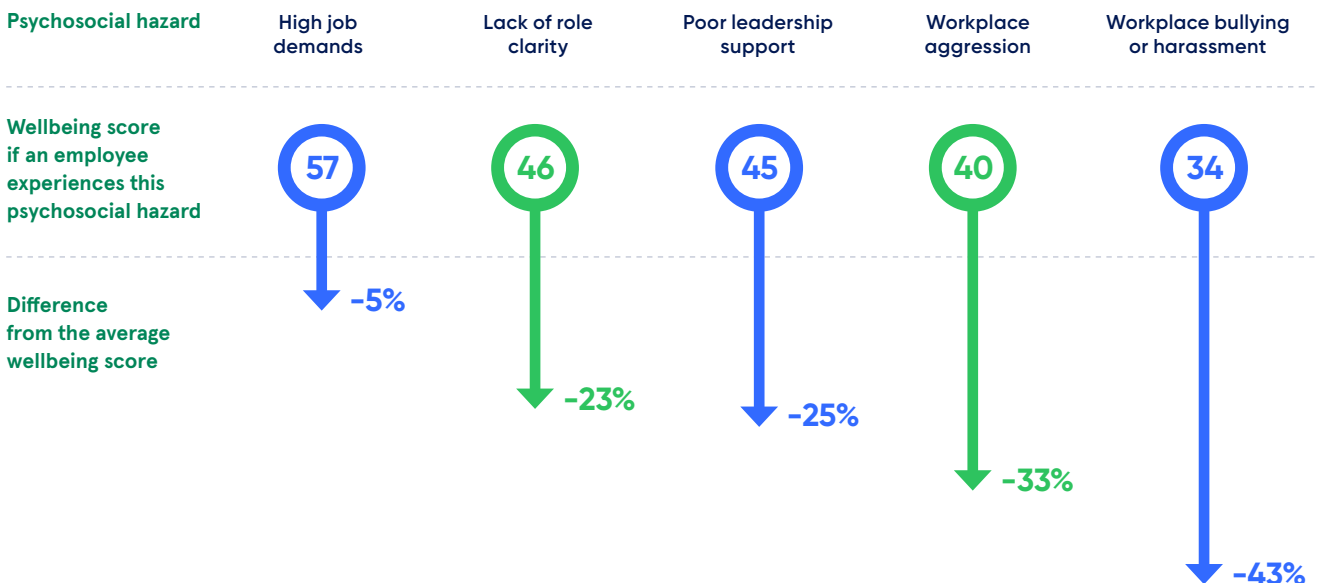
Across 2,000 employees, the average wellbeing score was 60 out of 100.



This means 60 per cent of respondents described their wellbeing as "good" or "excellent".



How do psychosocial hazards negatively impact employee wellbeing?



INSIGHT 4

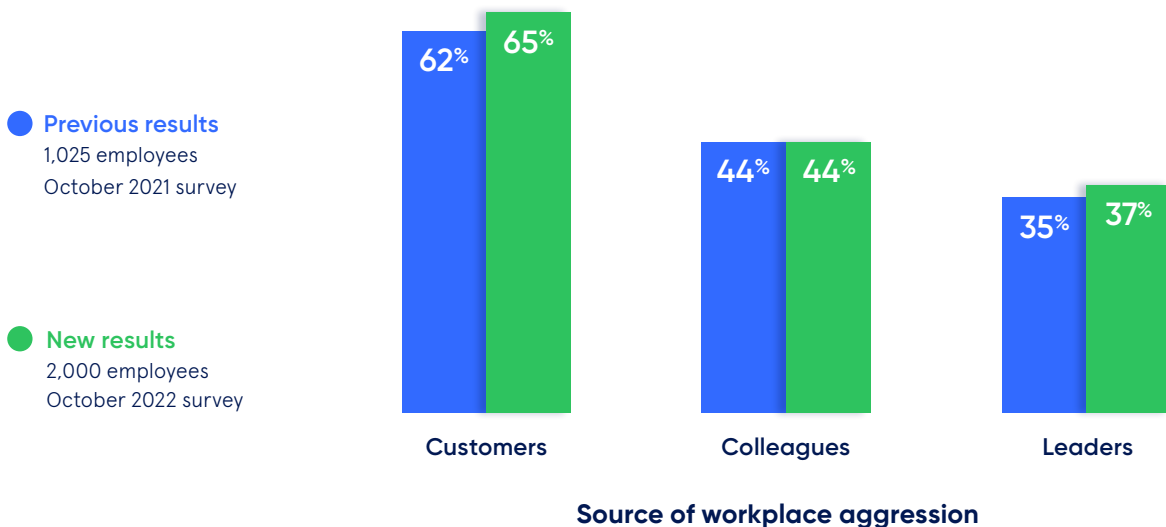
Workplace aggression is continuing from customers, colleagues, and leaders

Despite an easing of some of the pressures that proved challenging for employees during the height of the pandemic, workplace aggression still represents a physical and psychosocial hazard in the workplace.

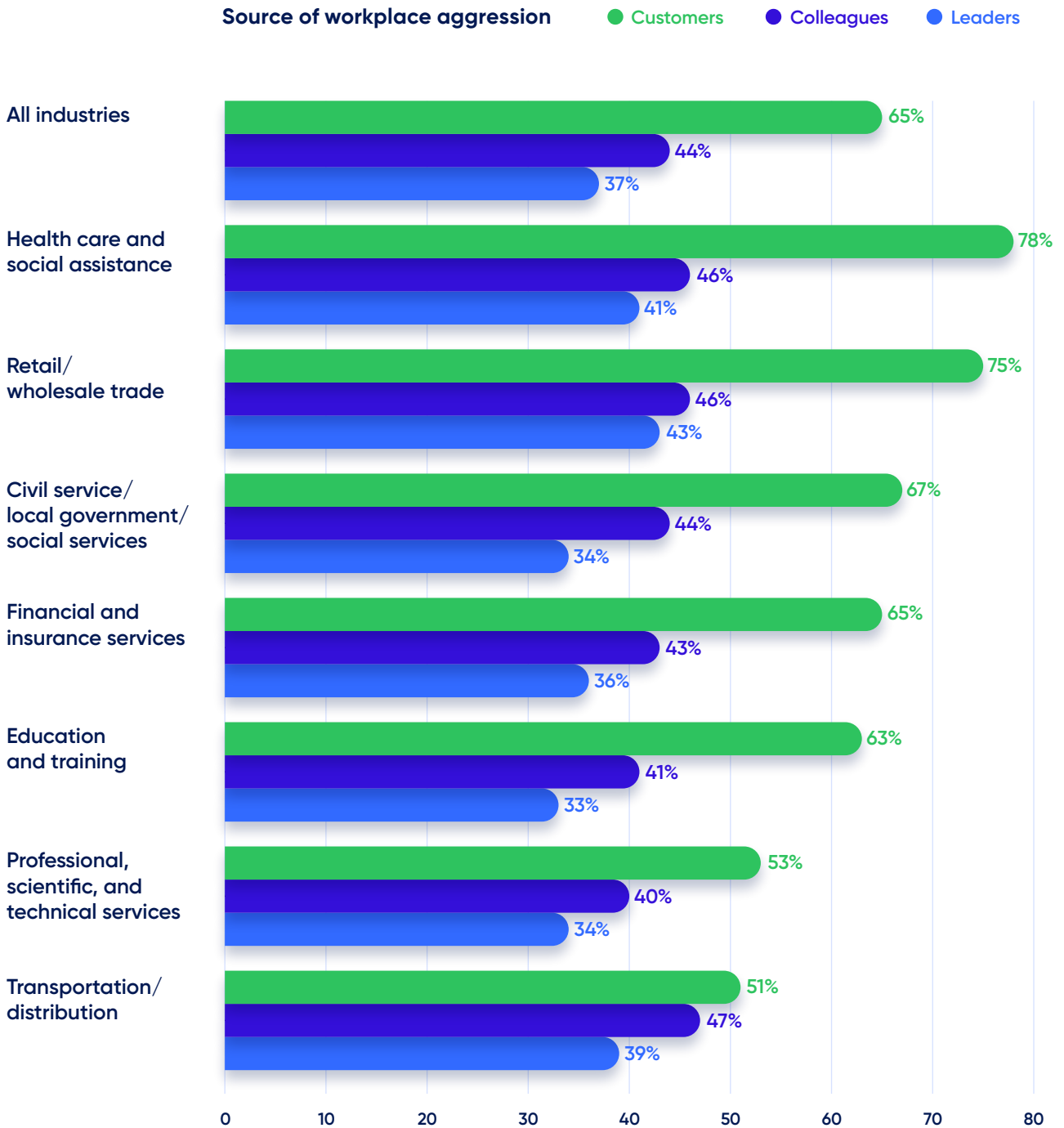
Most employees surveyed are experiencing some form of customer aggression in the workplace, with nearly one in two experiencing aggression from colleagues, and 37 per cent experiencing aggression from leaders.

In terms of industry variances, employees in the health care and retail/wholesale trade industries were more likely to experience workplace aggression. Transportation/distribution industry employees, however, were slightly more likely to experience aggression from colleagues.

How many employees experienced workplace aggression in the previous 12 months?



Industry breakdown of workplace aggression



Disclaimer: Industries with insufficient data points have been excluded from this table to ensure the validity of this report.

INSIGHT 5

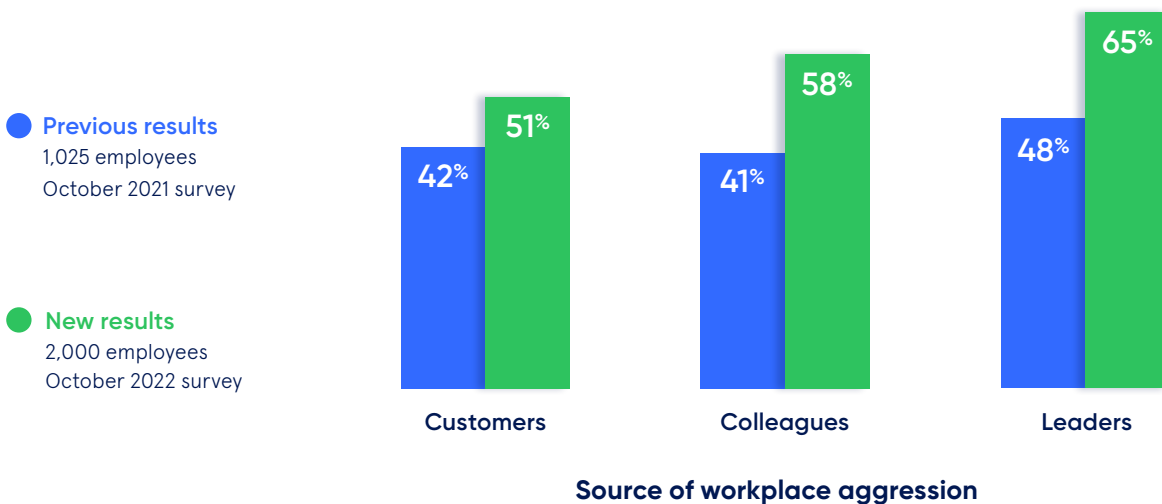
Post-incident support is decreasing for employees who experience workplace aggression

Contradictory to media and anecdotal reports that senior leadership teams are now more interested in employee wellbeing,⁷ workplaces are offering less support after incidents of aggression, not more.

Our survey results show a 20 per cent decrease in post-incident support after experiencing aggression from customers, a 40 per cent decrease in support if the aggression was from colleagues, and a 35 per cent decrease in support if the aggression was from leaders.

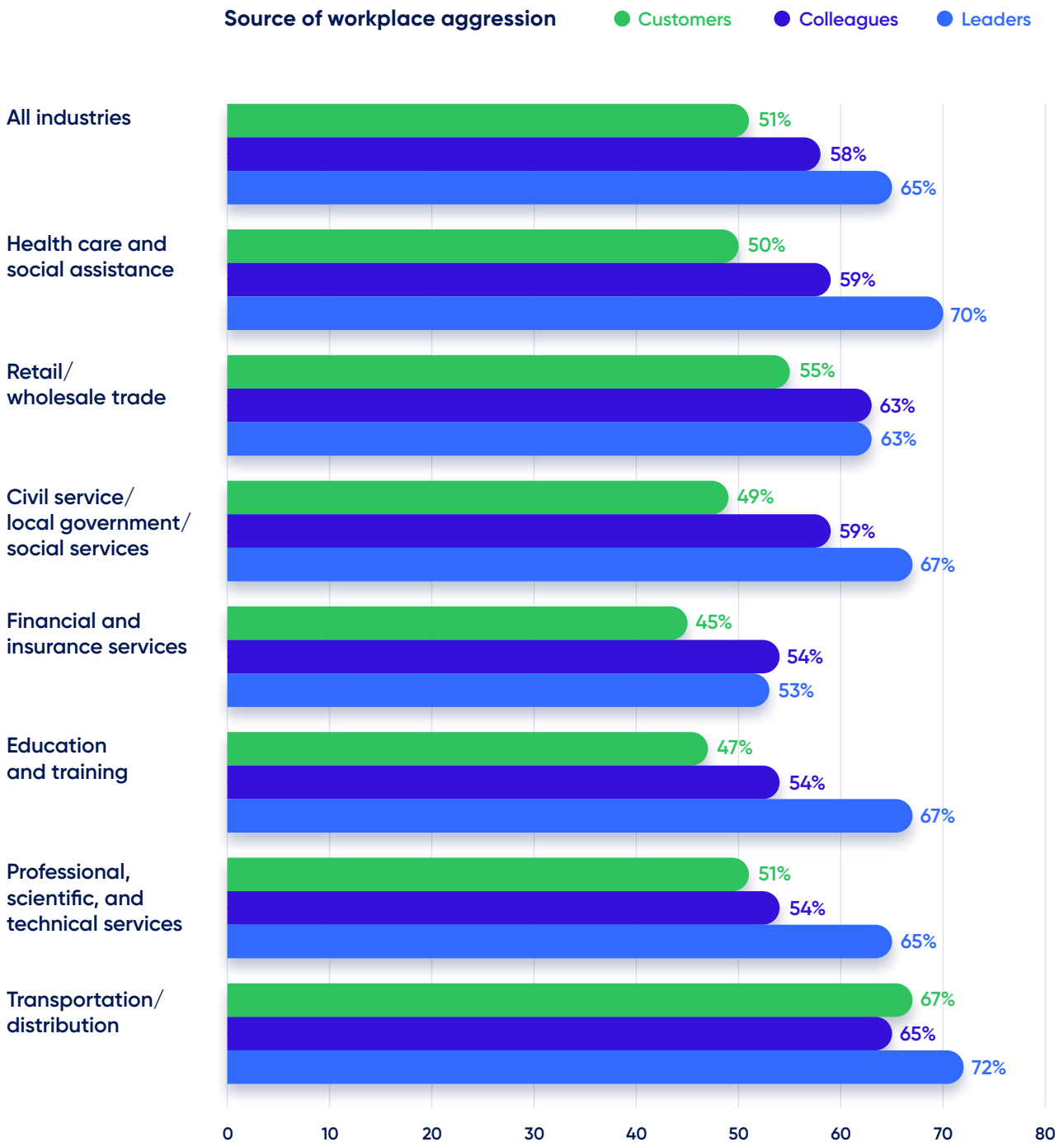
In terms of industry variances, employees in transportation/distribution received the least support across all three sources of workplace aggression. The retail/wholesale trade sector ranked second for lack of post-incident support after aggression from customers and colleagues. All sectors ranked poorly for post-incident support after aggression from leaders.

How many employees received no support after an incident of aggression?



⁷ Deloitte, Korn Ferry, Chief Executive

Industry breakdown of post-incident support



Disclaimer: Our industry breakdown excludes industries where the results were not statistically significant.

INSIGHT 6

External psychosocial hazards can impact workplace performance indirectly

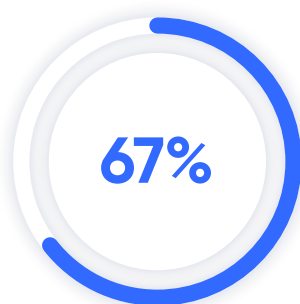


It's difficult for an employee to perform well at work if they or their loved ones are feeling unsafe or unwell at home.

Our survey data confirmed that external psychosocial hazards can have an indirect but considerable impact on employee motivation, absenteeism, work performance, and risk of attrition.

This means that for employers to provide meaningful support to employees, they should acknowledge “the myth of separate worlds” and offer resources and support for external hazards as well.⁹

Reduced motivation



of employees said external factors have negatively impacted their energy and motivation in the workplace

Increased risk of attrition



of employees considered leaving due to external factors

Absenteeism



of employees have taken time off work in the last 12 months due to concerns about the mental wellbeing of their friends or family

Living in an unsafe environment

44%

of employees who experienced domestic and family violence said it had a large impact on their performance at work

Suicide attempt by a close friend or family member

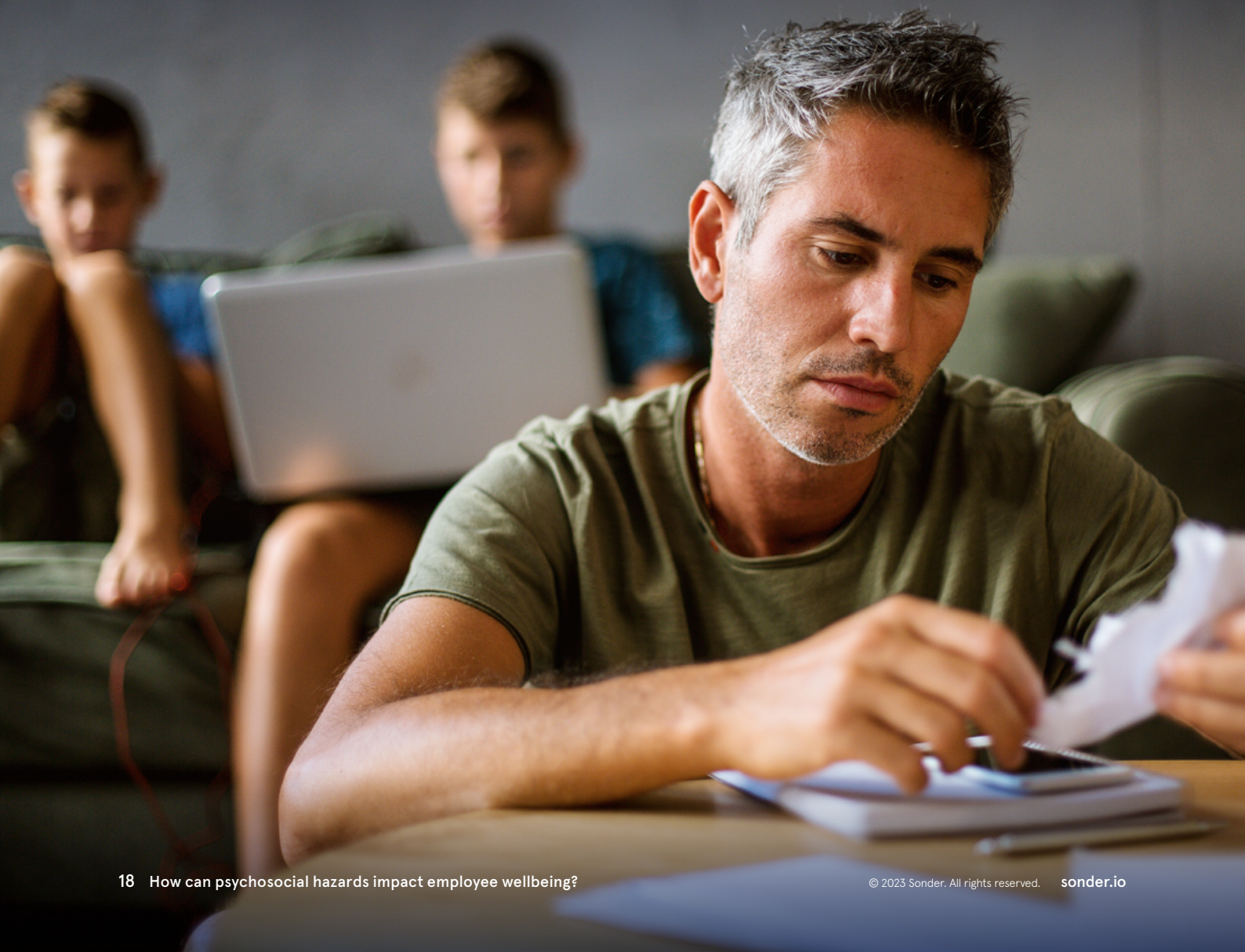
44%

of employees who had lived through a suicide attempt by a close friend or family member said it had a large impact on their performance at work

Financial pressure

25%

of employees who experienced financial pressure said it had a large impact on their performance at work



INSIGHT 7

Employee expectations remain high but their understanding of mental wellbeing programs remains low

Most employees expect help with their wellbeing, yet still do not understand all of the wellbeing programs available to them.

One in two are currently satisfied with their employer's mental wellbeing offerings, and nearly all said it's important their next employer offers mental wellbeing support.

Most employees are aware of their employer's mental wellbeing offerings, but only one in five say they understand all of the programs available to them.

Satisfaction and expectations

I am satisfied with my employer's mental wellbeing offerings



It is important for my next employer to offer mental wellbeing support

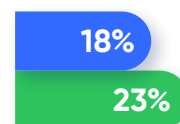


Awareness and understanding

I am aware of the mental wellbeing support programs my workplace offers



I understand all of the mental wellbeing programs available to me



● Previous results
1,025 employees, October 2021 survey

● New results
2,000 employees, October 2022 survey

Action planning and helpful tips

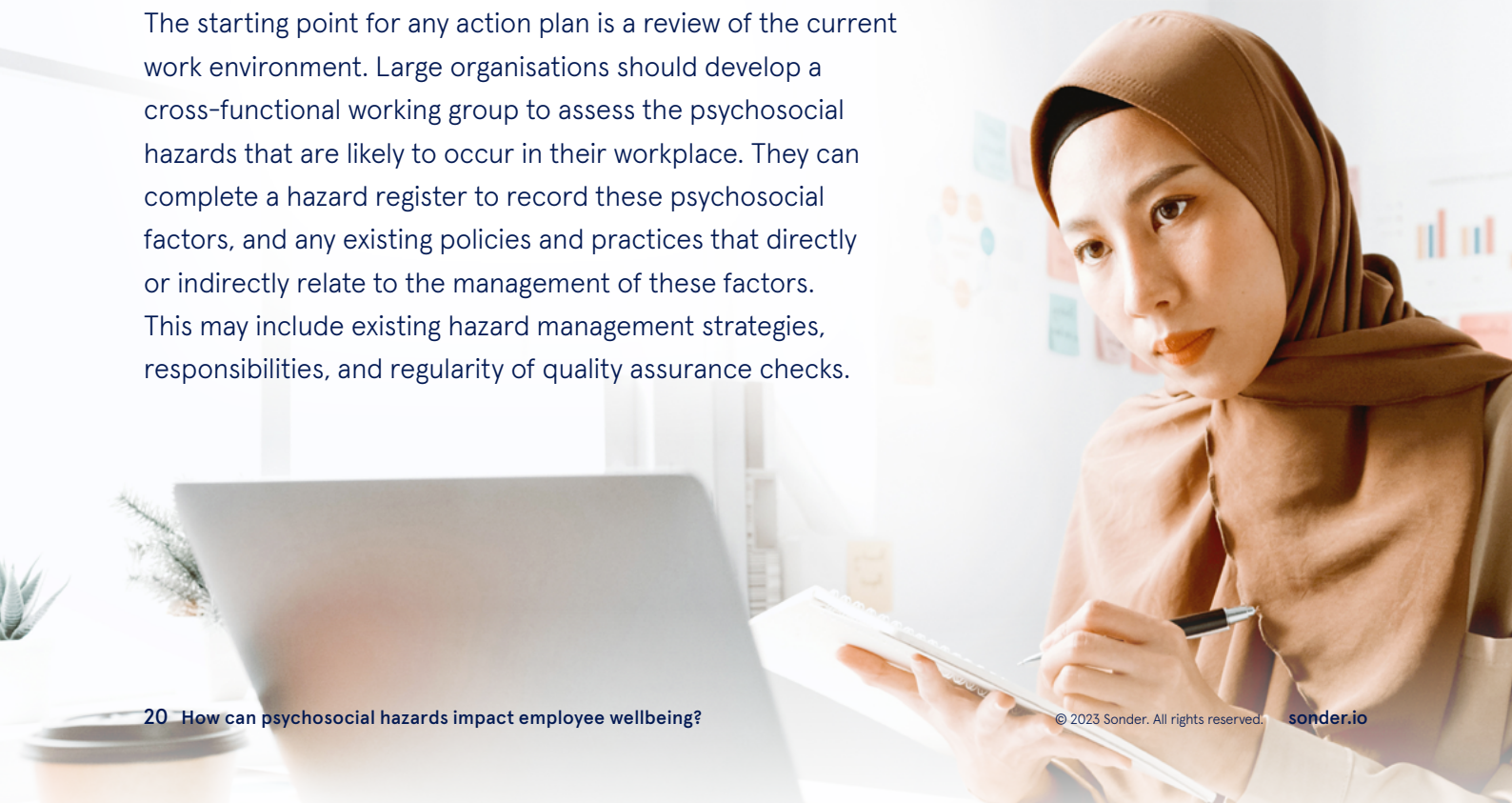
These survey results show that psychosocial hazards can impact everyone in the workplace. Whether we are experiencing them directly, or experiencing them indirectly via our colleagues, psychosocial hazards are important to address with a sense of urgency because they can negatively impact wellbeing, productivity, and performance across an entire organisation.

Written in collaboration with Dr Tessa Bailey BPsych (Hons) MOrgPsych PhD and Kevin St Mart BBus (Mktg) DiplInjMgt, from [The OPUS Centre for Psychosocial Risk](#).

Action Planning

Reviewing psychosocial hazards

The starting point for any action plan is a review of the current work environment. Large organisations should develop a cross-functional working group to assess the psychosocial hazards that are likely to occur in their workplace. They can complete a hazard register to record these psychosocial factors, and any existing policies and practices that directly or indirectly relate to the management of these factors. This may include existing hazard management strategies, responsibilities, and regularity of quality assurance checks.



Determine the level of risk

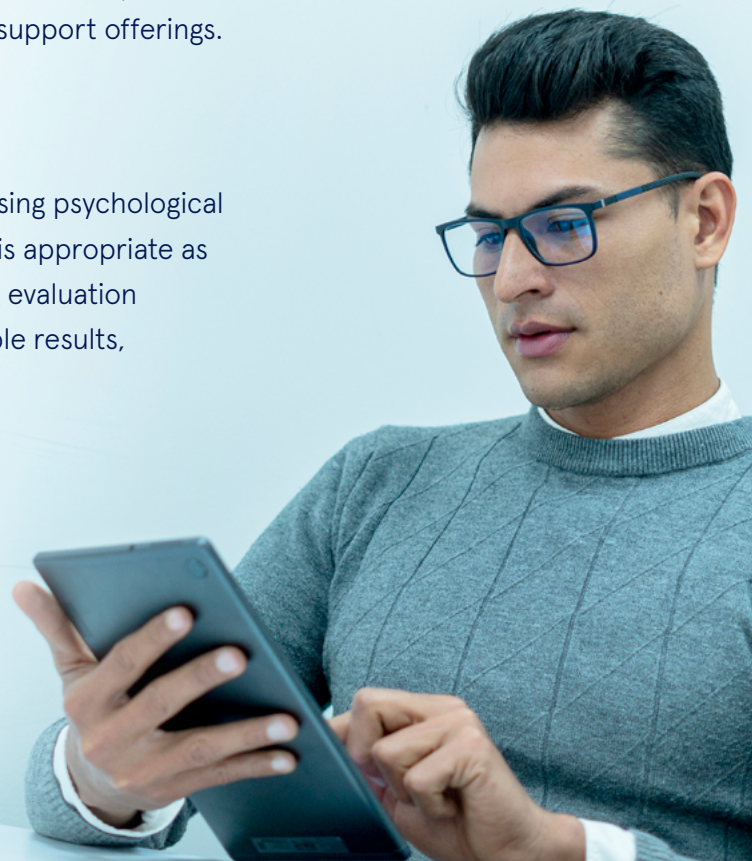
To prioritise resources and discussions, it's important to determine the level of risk associated with each psychosocial hazard - in the context of your workgroups, organisation, and industry. One structured way to conduct these assessments is via the use of a risk register (see Appendix A) that estimates the nature, severity, and frequency of each psychosocial hazard, as well as the extent and effectiveness of current controls in place. Assessments should be evidence-based - via consultation, surveys, and measurable observations (e.g. bullying or code of conduct allegations, disclosure of health outcomes, absenteeism, time taken for workers' compensation leave, and so on). You should also be able to demonstrate that all employees have had an opportunity to contribute to the determination of the level of risk for your organisation.

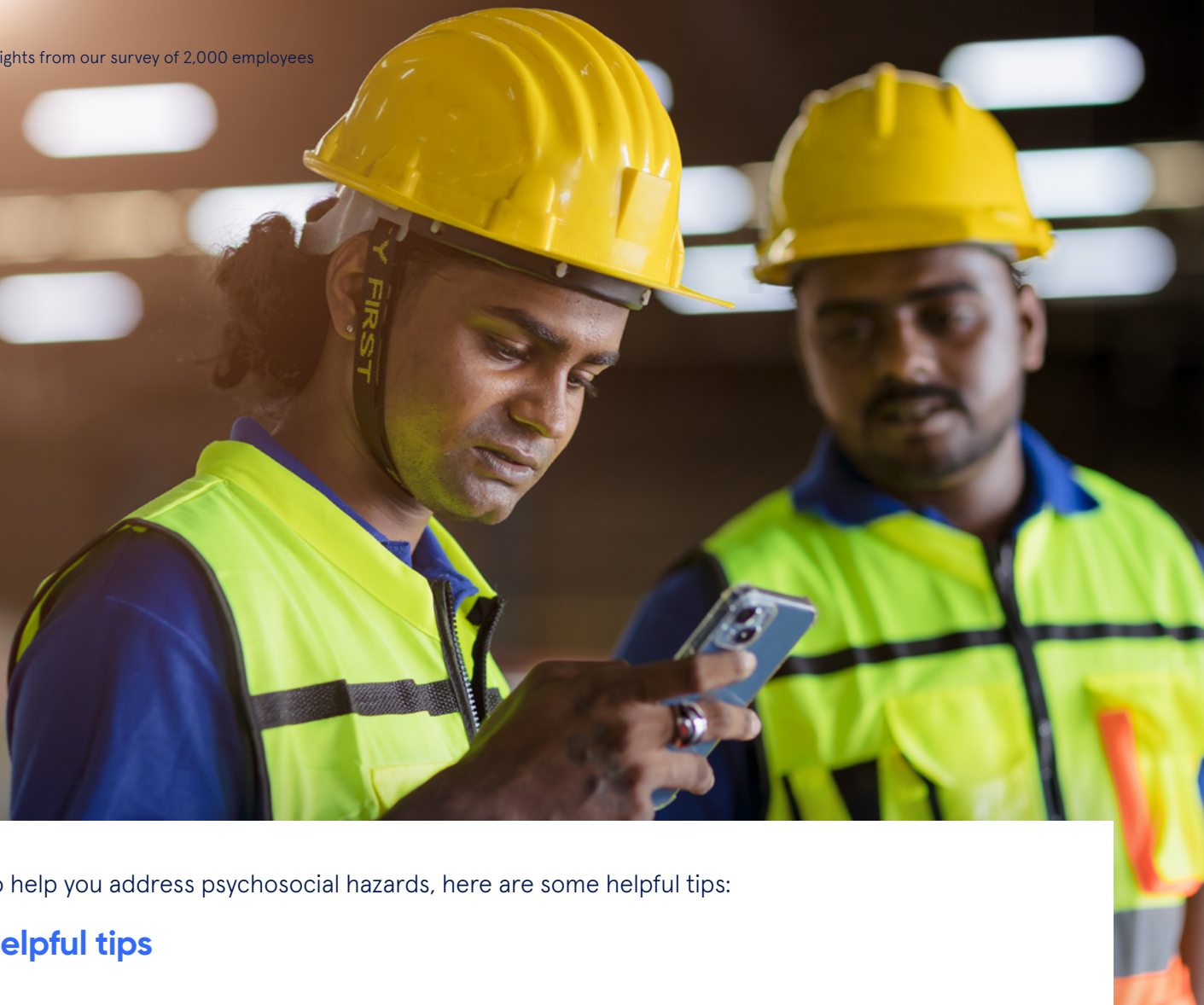
Identify and resolve gaps in key controls

The risk assessment process will support the identification of hazards that are not being mitigated by appropriate controls, so it is critical that these gaps are captured and prioritised. Every business will have gaps, so don't be concerned if you have a long list. Further, this will be an ongoing process of monitoring, review and renewal to ensure you are best supporting your team. Common controls include accurate job descriptions, simple and well understood policies, and appropriate support offerings.

Create a plan for ongoing evaluation

Whilst a short-term plan for addressing the most pressing psychological hazards through the control implementation outlined is appropriate as a first step, a longer-term plan which includes ongoing evaluation and continuous improvement will yield more sustainable results, and will better satisfy regulators.





To help you address psychosocial hazards, here are some helpful tips:

Helpful tips

Prioritise support

This survey highlighted that employees are not receiving the support they need, especially from their leaders. If left unchecked, this may lead to poorer health outcomes, plus other psychosocial hazards. If addressed as a priority, our data confirmed that employee wellbeing scores can nearly double - which could be a game changer for organisational performance.

Consider offering after-hours support

Given that external psychosocial hazards can indirectly but significantly impact workplace performance, organisations should consider offering wellbeing support that extends beyond work hours, so people can get the support they need, when they need it.

Ensure senior leaders 'walk the talk'

Senior leaders with high levels of interpersonal skills and empathy are well placed to model supportive behaviours. Ensure senior leaders encourage leaders to mitigate psychosocial hazards, motivate people to access wellbeing resources and support, and inspire everyone in the workplace to integrate employee wellbeing into business decisions.

Upskill your leaders

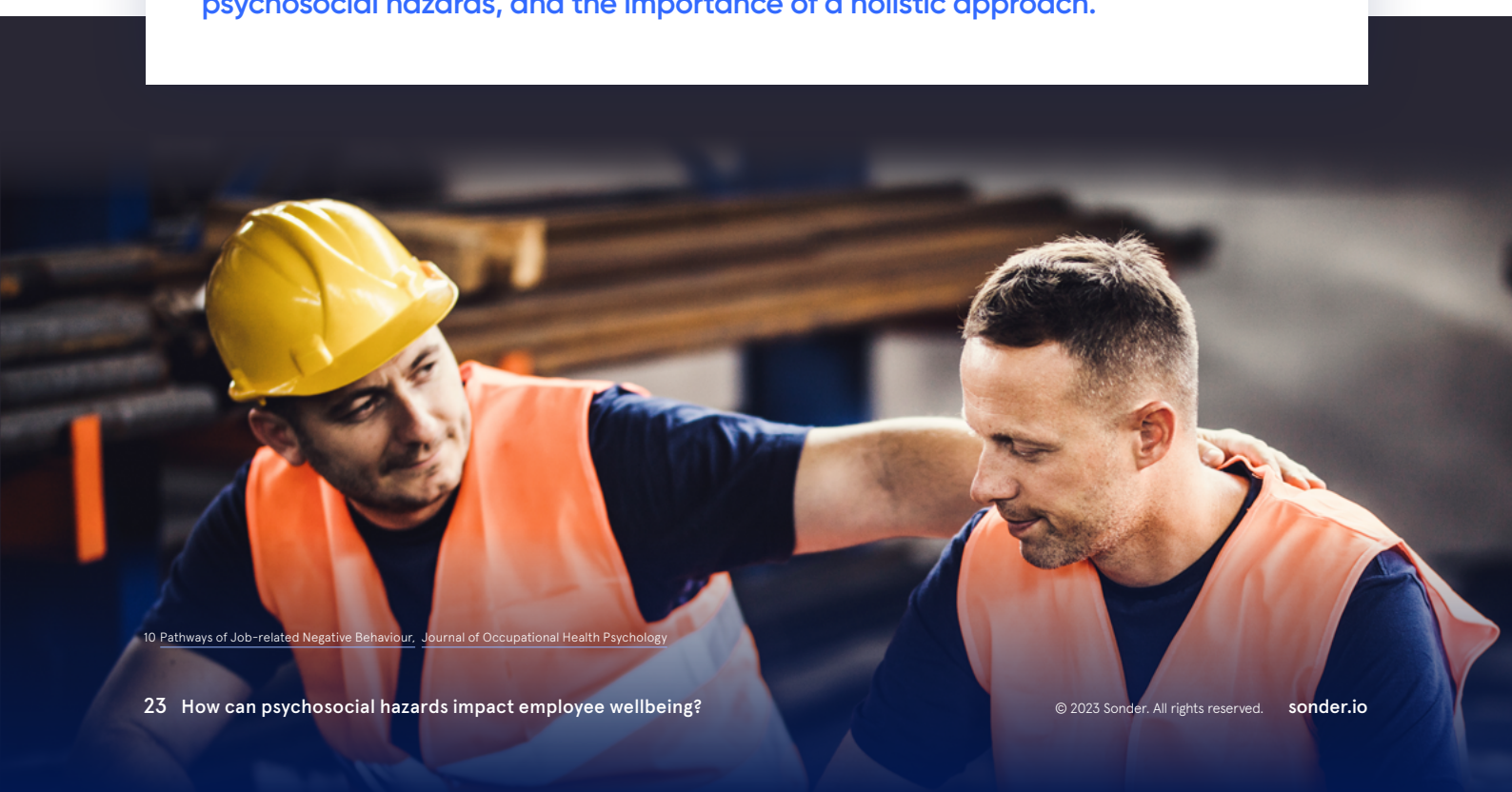
Management support is essential to employee health and motivation – but not every leader understands this relationship and/or how to be a best-practice leader. That’s why organisations and senior leadership need to build the skills and confidence of their leaders. Good leaders set clear expectations about performance and behaviour, role model those expectations, and address concerns relating to excessive workloads, role conflict, and/or inappropriate workplace behaviour.

Act swiftly to complaints of bullying and harassment

Being exposed to bullying and/or harassment is a known hazard and employers should aim for zero tolerance. This includes setting clear expectations for appropriate behaviour at the time of recruitment, throughout induction, and in ongoing training and communications during employment. When bullying and harassment occurs, organisations need to act swiftly and investigate complaints in a timely and appropriate manner to mitigate the risk of any further undue harm.

Research shows that excessive mental and emotional demands, combined with inadequate resources and support, can lead to higher levels of bullying and harassment.¹⁰ This is a reminder of the interconnection between different psychosocial hazards, and the importance of a holistic approach.

¹⁰ Pathways of Job-related Negative Behaviour. Journal of Occupational Health Psychology



APPENDIX A

Psychosocial risk register

This is an example risk register from Safe Work Australia’s Code of Practice, [Managing psychosocial hazards at work](#) (p.54). It is a suggested template to track and assess the risk of various psychosocial hazards.

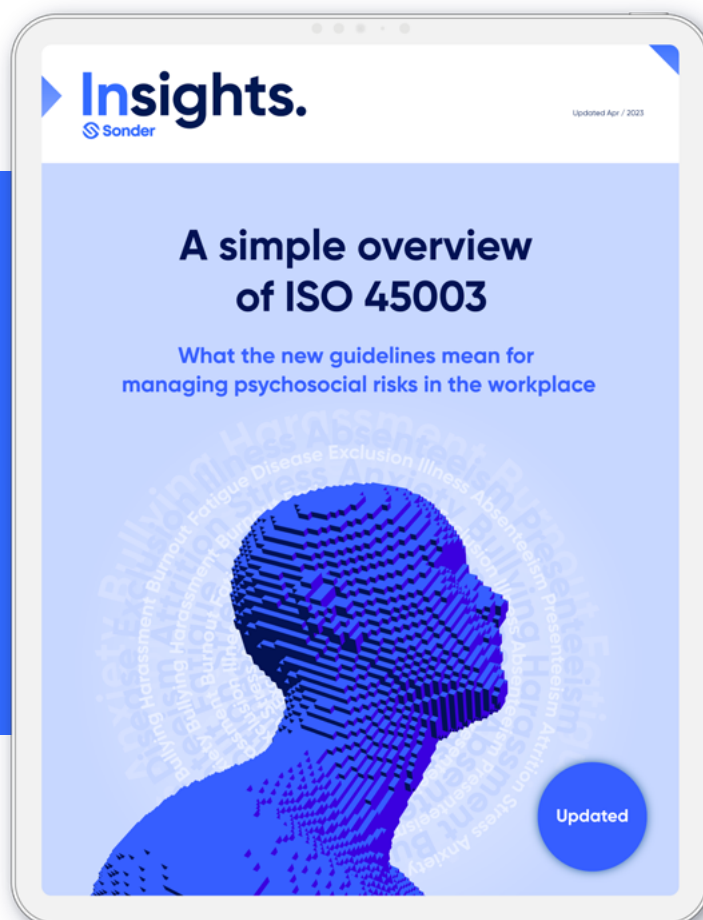
	Example	Hazard 1	Hazard 2	Hazard 3
Location	Head office			
Date	01/08/2023			
Hazard	High work demand (end of financial year sales)			
How frequently are workers exposed to this hazard?	Once a year			
How long does this exposure last?	1 month			
How severe is their exposure?	Moderate, most staff are unable to complete essential tasks and report feeling stressed			
Are other hazards present this may interact with?	Yes, aggressive customers and low support from supervisors			
How effective are the current controls?	Moderate. Workers are encouraged to leave nonessential tasks but still struggle to keep up with demands.			
What further controls are required?	Additional workers to be assigned to busy shifts			
Actioned by	J. Blogs			
Date due	31/08/2023			
Date complete	01/08/2023			
Maintenance and review	To be reviewed after the first week of this year’s sales			

APPENDIX B

ISO 45003

Published in June 2021, ISO 45003 is the first global standard that provides specific guidance on the management of psychosocial risks (and the promotion of wellbeing at work) in a manner consistent with other health and safety risks in the workplace.

To help you understand this best-practice standard, we invite you to download our free guide, [A simple overview of ISO 45003](#), which explains why ISO 45003 is important and outlines relevant WHS rules and guidelines.



[Download now](#)

About us

Sonder is an Active Care technology company that helps organisations improve the wellbeing of their people so they perform at their best.

Our mobile app provides immediate, 24/7 support from a team of safety, medical, and mental health professionals - plus onsite help for time-sensitive scenarios.

Accredited by the Australian Council on Healthcare Standards (ACHS), our platform gives leaders the insights they need to act on tomorrow's wellbeing challenges today.



Our clinicians are registered and accredited by:



Australia

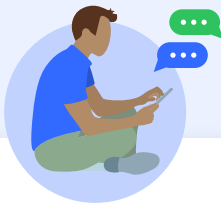


New Zealand



United Kingdom

How we help



Immediate assessment

Chat with a Sonder care specialist in 15 seconds or less - day or night



In-person response

Get on-the-ground assistance so you're not alone in difficult times



Sonder specialists

Access our clinical team of registered nurses, doctors, psychologists, and more



Wellbeing resources

Build a happier, healthier you - in just a few minutes a day



Safety scanning

Avoid unsafe situations and outcomes before they arise

Care in your hands

Let's connect



sonder.io

