



Organizational Safety and Outcomes for Families

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Research on workplace safety, along with organizational, union and policy-maker attention on workers' safety, has increased over the past few decades. While employee safety has improved, occupational injury rates remain persistently high, and research continues to show the detrimental effects of workplace injuries for individuals, organizations, and society¹. Existing research, understandably, tends to be mired in a search for the antecedents of accidents, injuries and fatalities, with less focus on their consequences. In this piece we elaborate on one of our current major research programs: extending existing knowledge on the outcomes of workplace safety by examining how injuries at work affect family members.

The research that exists on workplace safety consequences has focused primarily on the negative outcomes for those individuals who are personally injured at work. The research in this area has been conducted with little attention focused on indirect individual effects; that is, effects for individuals who are not direct victims of an injury, but exposed to a workplace injury by seeing it, hearing about it or its consequences, or by living with

its consequences on a regular basis. Research from other areas (e.g., violence, harassment) indicates that individuals are negatively affected by indirect exposure to negative workplace events², and given that those who see or hear about workplace injuries would far outnumber those directly affected, it is important to understand the nature and consequences of indirect exposure to workplace injuries. Although indirect exposure to workplace injuries could be the result of various interpersonal relationships (e.g., coworkers, clients, customers), we argue that any effects of indirect exposure to injuries at work might be greatest for close family members, and that it is important to understand these effects given the potential implications for the well-being of individuals and their families.

Despite a great deal of data derived from well-designed research showing that work affects the personal lives of employees and their family members³, there has been little research on the relationship between occupational injuries and the personal lives and family members of those who are injured. Research shows that work affects individuals' overall well-being and life satisfaction, and further, that the work experience of one individual affects the well-being and relationship satisfaction of his or her family members⁴. Relatedly, sickness and certain injuries (e.g., cancer, brain injuries) affect interpersonal





relationship quality, and highlights relevant issues for our research. For example, with romantic partner sickness, an individual may experience a change in role from partner to caregiver, and as such potentially feel anger, fear, or hopelessness. Given that employees' work and well-being experiences affect themselves and their family members, we propose that workplace injuries will have effects for injured individuals' romantic partners/spouses, children, and parents.

Workplace injuries constitute chronic job stressors, with the potential to lead to stress, and, in turn, to strain. Our research examines how the stress resulting from the particular characteristics of the workplace injury will influence the injured individual's family members' personal relationships and overall wellbeing. In this research, we move beyond the common perspective of a workplace injury as binary (i.e., injured or not injured), and conceptualize workplace injury broadly, capturing its nuances (e.g., severity, pain). We argue that any effects of the stress experienced as a result of a workplace injury on a family member will be mediated by the family member's affective response to the injury (e.g., fear, anxiety, hopelessness). Furthermore, we expect that workplace injuries will be more likely to result in the experience of stress, and stress will be more likely to result in strain, when family members engage in activities that may further reduce their health (e.g., inadequate sleep, substance use), have limited social support (from organizations, supervisors, co-workers, family members, friends), are under financial strain, or experience stigma as a result of the injury. Our research to date has examined the effect of injuries on romantic partners, spouses and parents, and provides initial support for some of these propositions; overall, our findings suggest that when an individual is injured at work there are detrimental outcomes for romantic partners, spouses, and parents, but that these outcomes can be mitigated by various activities and experiences.

This research is designed to extend knowledge on the outcomes associated with occupational safety. We know that employees who endure injuries at work often experience detrimental outcomes, but there is less evidence focusing on whether others are affected indirectly. Understanding the extent to which workplace injuries affect outcomes related to personal lives and family members will have implications for developing a conceptual understanding of the severity of a workplace injury on direct and indirect victims, theory and research on work-family and workplace safety, evidence-based knowledge guiding public policy development, and organizational and union initiatives and interventions related to work-family and workplace safety. Although organizational safety has improved over the last century, evidence that workplace injuries affect outcomes related to personal lives and families may provide further impetus to improve safety at work, and may simultaneously advance the understanding of the work-family interface.

For a complete list of references, please go to www.cpa.ca/psynopsis

Developing Psychologically Healthy Workers and Healthy Workplaces

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One of the major areas of OHP has been the impact of psychosocial work factors on individual health and well-being, not only in terms of how work can lead to stress, but also how facets of work can promote health and well-being.^{vi} For example, the CREW (Civility, Respect, & Engagement at Work) program is a validated team-based initiative that has been shown to improve the social work environment by reducing incivility from supervisors, absenteeism, and feelings of cynicism, as well as increasing coworker civility and feelings of being respected, job satisfaction, and trust in management.^{vii}

Similarly, ABLE (Achieving Balance in Life & Employment program) is a tailored phone-based coaching program that incorporates traditional goal setting and coping with increasing recovery experiences and workplace resources to improve worker health and well-being. Across two studies, it has demonstrated improvements in participant well-being (such as increase life satisfaction and positive mood, and reduced perceived stress and conflict).^{viii}

Collectively, these global areas of health and safety can be conceptualized in terms of Psychologically Healthy Workplaces, which support and foster a respectful culture, promoting workers' psychological and physical health and safety, benefiting the workers and the overall organization. Psychologically Healthy Workplace initiatives involve developing and recognizing workers, involving them in decision-making and work procedures, helping them balance their work and non-work demands, implementing safe work procedures, and developing mission statements to guide respectful workplace interactions.^{ix x xi} Although there is little longitudinal research examining the impact of psychologically healthy workplaces, the preliminary results are promising, indicating that they are associated with more positive individual and organizational outcomes.^{xii}

Because of the amount of time we spend at work and the powerful influence work can have on our lives, the workplace has the potential for being an effective setting for improving health and well-being, especially if we can develop supportive, respectful work cultures, and if we implement valid psychological and physical health initiatives. I/O Psychology and OHP have been at the forefront of workplace health research, drawing upon both specialized OHP research and knowledge gleaned from other areas of psychology to improve working conditions (e.g., increase safety, reduce job stress) and to highlight the benefits of work and a psychologically healthy workplace (e.g., in terms of developing a sense of mastery, efficacy, and accomplishment in workers, and providing a positive social structure). Given the impact of work, the history of creating healthy workers, and the growing focus on healthy workplaces, continuing the tradition of applying psychology to improve worker well-being is a critical step in addressing overall health.

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