CASE STUDY

MANAGING WORKPLACE PSYCHOSOCIAL HAZARDS

ARTS AND RECREATION SERVICES SECTOR

A large club with an entertainment venue that can hold up to 400 people for live concerts and performances, normally held in the evening or at night. Events are run by an event management team that consists of a manager and four other staff, including a young female trainee.

The workforce and work duties of staff change each night according to the event and artists performing. Casual workers are rostered to assist the event management team during events. Most workers are male, and a few are female. Several staff have shifts with people they have never worked with before.

The work environment

Many event patrons are intoxicated or under the influence of other substances. All workers report being verbally abused by patrons at times. Workers also report receiving frequent comments from patrons of a sexual nature, and in some cases, being touched or groped by them.

Staff work in pairs but are often separated due to work tasks. This can lead to workers being alone in areas with poor lighting where patrons congregate. Workers report that this is where most of the inappropriate comments or incidents of harassment occur.

Managers of the acts booked are provided with documented procedures on how events are to be managed but these are not often followed. Some artists are intoxicated or under the influence of other substances during the event and can be verbally or physically aggressive with venue staff.

Workers also report violent or aggressive interactions with patrons, most frequently occurring as patrons leave the venue at the end of the night. Recently, two security staff were assaulted after an event, and one is yet to return to work due to the injuries sustained. The same worker is reporting anxiety about returning to the venue due to the assault.

There are no policies or procedures regarding incident reporting, respectful workplace behaviors or managing the risks of violence. When workers raise concerns or report incidents, management advises them that it is just 'part of the job'.

New workers are only given a five-minute walk-through of the venue. Managers do not provide any further assistance or inductions on safety systems. There is a significant turnover of workers at the venue. Young workers often complete casual shifts, but then refuse to return to work there.

Identifying psychosocial hazards

The business owner, after receiving several reports about workers' experiences, identifies these main psychosocial hazards:

- Sexual harassment
- Occupational violence
- Isolated work
- Poor support from management
- Lack of role clarity

Definitions regarding the following hazards and other psychosocial hazards are outlined in SafeWork NSW Managing Psychosocial Hazards at Work Code of Practice.

Identifying controls to manage psychosocial hazards

The business owner then consults with the event management team and all casual staff employed by the venue to get their views on:

- o What do they feel the main risks are?
- o What do they think can be done to control such risks?
- o What have they observed at other sites that worked to address these risks?

The owner also surveys workers and management using the Workplace Wellbeing Assessment tool to assess the capability of the business to provide a mentally healthy workplace.

Implementing psychosocial controls

Based on consultation with staff, the business owner implements controls to address sexual harassment, occupational violence, isolated work, lack of role clarity and poor support from management by:

Implementing safety policies and systems

- Maintaining a 'buddy system' to ensure workers are not isolated and rostering on additional workers as needed to support this system.
- Implementing a code of conduct policy which outlines what is and isn't acceptable behavior.
- Embedding the code of conduct policy into contracts for artists and their crew and reinforcing it when they are on site.
- Implementing a reporting system for incidents, including sexual harassment and violence, and ensuring workers are inducted and trained in using the system.
- Implementing a process for responding and investigating incidents in a confidential, procedurally fair and timely manner.
- Arranging follow-ups to check on the safety and health of the parties involved in incidents, to offer support and find out whether actions taken to stop the behavior have been effective.

Providing staff with comprehensive information and training

- Conducting comprehensive inductions for all new staff which explains the venue's code of conduct, incident reporting system and who they can go to if they need support on their shift.
- Providing clear descriptions of the roles and responsibilities of the event management team and casual staff rostered on for each event.
- Arranging workplace mental health training for all leaders, workers and managers to give them tools to promote positive mental health at work.
- Educating all staff on sexual harassment in the workplace, through programs like Access All Areas training designed to educate members of the music workforce on how to actively intervene when witnessing sexual harassment, sexual assault, harassment and bullying.

Creating a safer work environment

- Conducting a brief review with working staff after each event or fortnightly (whichever is first), to gain feedback on how the event was managed.
- Putting into place an action plan for the next event, to reduce any potential hazards.
- Promoting a zero-tolerance venue with consequences for inappropriate behavior communicated via the ticket sale process, social media and posters displayed at the bar and in the bathrooms.
- Increasing the focus on the responsible service of alcohol and removal of intoxicated patrons.
- Providing dedicated work areas for venue staff segregated from patrons, artists and their support staff to minimise interaction with intoxicated people when working alone.
- Identifying areas of the venue and times of the event that are 'high risk' of incidents occurring and deploying more security presence at those locations and times.
- Assigning security to do walk-throughs in areas of the club where staff report issues are more likely to occur.
- Assessing the design of the site for safety and considering opportunities to increase lighting or change the layout of the event to increase safety.