



WORK-RELATED WELLBEING

What good looks like for Pasifika workers

Factors which protect workers' wellbeing are important to consider when developing mentally healthy work. Too many New Zealanders suffer ill-health as a result of work.

WorkSafe New Zealand has carried out research to understand what work-related factors are perceived to contribute most to the wellbeing of New Zealand workers across different industry and worker groups. WorkSafe has developed this information to guide businesses in the design of initiatives to support mentally healthy work, and demonstrate the benefits of this for workers, businesses, whānau, and the wider community.

The findings from this research reflect only the views of those participants who were invited and opted to participate in the study. Due to the small sample size, the results are not intended to be generalisable and should only be regarded as a starting point for further consideration.

Nine Pasifika workers were included in this research, representing a range of industries and roles. The protective factors show that were identified by Pasifika workers we spoke with which support their work-related wellbeing. The following section highlights things an organisation can change in their immediate environment.

Protective factors

Recognition and reward

- The Pasifika workers we spoke with are strongly motivated by financial rewards and more likely than non-Pasifika to view their work primarily as a way to provide financially for their immediate and extended family (including family in the Pacific). Receiving an appropriate level of pay, and having mechanisms for pay reviews in the workplace can help Pasifika workers to feel motivated and provides them with peace of mind.

"If you're the provider, then you've got to do whatever's necessary to make ends meet."

- Pasifika may be less likely to be motivated by a desire for advancement and promotion compared non-Pasifika. Promotions can be viewed as being accompanied by unnecessary stress and pressure and may only be taken up if the increase in pay is perceived to adequately compensate for the increased level of stress and responsibility.

"I just go to work, do what's required of me and I can leave whatever at work and not bring it home. I've been in that situation before where I've had the stress and the pressure, brought it home with me and family have suffered. It's not worth it, no."

Interpersonal relationships

- The Pasifika workers we spoke with have a strong preference for working in teams rather than individually. Work teams are often perceived as ‘work family’, and can help workers to feel supported and integrate new team members into the team quickly.
“The thing I love about work] is all the boys there, being together. My son works there, we all work together and get on. I look forward to going to work every day. [Even if I won Lotto] I wouldn’t leave work.”
- Pasifika workers appreciate having opportunities to engage in ‘banter’ and shared jokes to help minimise stress and reduce boredom levels when undertaking mundane work.
“It’s important to have a good team culture – a bit of banter, having a joke around with people, making fun of each other, having a good time, everyone laughing – which makes the day go faster.”

Work-life balance

- Because family is the cornerstone of Pasifika culture, Pasifika workers (particularly women) appreciate workplaces that are understanding of their responsibilities to their family and are open to providing flexibility for workers, for example, allowing time off to deal with family issues, or take children to appointments. Acknowledging and incorporating Pasifika workers’ cultures into plans for flexibility helps workers to feel understood and supported.
“My work understands and they give me the flexibility, so I can have some time out, have some ‘me’ time. We have lots of [family issues] and [my manager] is understanding. So it helps me. I’m stressed sometimes, but my workplace help me out a lot. They understand the culture. They understand that we have to be well enough to look after ourselves, as well, our spiritual, our physical, mentally and psychological. And also our family. If you have those balanced and then you’re able to do your job well.”

Organisational culture

- The Pasifika workers we spoke with highlighted the importance of promoting a culture where it is psychologically safe to raise concerns (for example, around health and safety) or to say ‘no’. In Pacific cultures, the challenging of elders and those of a higher chiefly status can be seen as disrespectful, and language issues or a lack of understanding and confidence in appropriately raising issues can result in issues not being raised.
“I think [there is a cultural] aspect to health and wellbeing. In the cultural aspect, there is the part of it where you learn to apply the principle of respect. You need to show respect to your parents, your wife – and your boss.”
- In particular, older Pasifika workers can have a strong work ethic, but appreciate being encouraged not to over-commit themselves out of fear of disrespecting their managers.
“Companies will ask you to do things. You have the right just to say ‘No, I can’t do it’, but I’m just one of those that will just go, ‘Hey yeah, yeah, okay’. And the thing is it keeps you in a good relationship with your bosses. You earn money and stay in the boss’s good books but you miss out on family time.”