



## Mental Health and the Public Health Workforce



**Marissa Baker, PhD**  
Public Health Professor  
University of Washington



**Lily Monsey, BA**  
Research Coordinator  
University of Washington

hot topics  
in practice

[www.nwcenter.org](http://www.nwcenter.org)

**Northwest Center**  
FOR PUBLIC HEALTH PRACTICE

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The Northwest Center for Public Health Practice acknowledges the land we occupy today as the traditional home of the Tulalip, Muckleshoot, Duwamish and Suquamish tribal nations.

Without them we would not have access to this working, teaching and learning environment. We humbly take the opportunity to thank the original caretakers of this land who are still here.

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### Question for the Viewers

*Think of your current job. How do you feel it impacts your mental health?*

- A. Positively
- B. Negatively
- C. Both positively and negatively
- D. It doesn't impact my mental health
- E. Other (please type in chat)

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Hello!

Who we are:

- Washington state natives
- Public Health professor and Research Coordinator
- Occupational health & safety researchers



Who we are not:

- Psychiatrists, counselors, or psychologists  
(We cannot give medical advice!)

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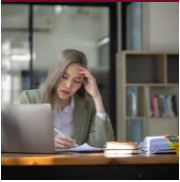
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Influence of Workplace on Mental Health



Improving Workplace Mental Health and Wellbeing



Positive Interventions for the Public Health Workforce



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Influence of Workplace on Mental Health



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Two separate, but related, wellbeing buckets



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What is Stress?



I bet for many of you, you identified an aspect of your job that increases your STRESS.

- Typical reaction to stress is resilience
- Stress can be negative or positive
- Chronic stressors can lead to burnout or mental health impacts

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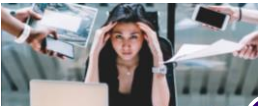
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**Stress**

- Normal response to situational pressures
- Still hopeful things can change
- Can be positive or negative: may be motivating, or cause lack of sleep

vs



**Burnout**

- State of exhaustion caused by excessive, chronic stress
- More severe than stress
- Can lead to fatigue, low motivation, inability to meet constant demands

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A mental illness impacts how an individual...



**Thinks**



**Feels**



**Behaves**

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How work environment can negatively impact wellbeing

Personal Interactions	Work Practices	Work Experiences
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Microaggressions</li> <li>Harassment</li> <li>Discrimination</li> <li>Unfair treatment</li> <li>Lack of support</li> <li>Feeling "othered"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Long/irregular hours</li> <li>Little control over work tasks</li> <li>High job demands</li> <li>Low pay</li> <li>Job insecurity</li> <li>Feeling unsafe</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Experience traumatic event</li> <li>Asked to undertake unethical behavior</li> <li>Injured at work</li> </ul>

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Personal Interactions: Women in the trades

So I ended up with this journeyman who—he was doing this work up in the attic and he would make me crawl in front of him. I had never been in this attic before but I had to crawl in front of him as we're doing this job. The only thing I can guess is cause he wanted to watch me crawl from behind!

*-Journey Level Tradeswoman*

There's [men] that just basically say, "whatever I can do to make your life miserable, and possibly get you off this job, I'm gonna do it."

*-Journey Level Tradeswoman*

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Work Practices: App-based drivers during COVID-19

And whoever is going out, we encourage them to get a PPE, even though Uber is not supplying them. [King county provided] face mask and gloves to be distributed among members of the community...we reach out to drivers and share it at the lot and airport. And then we go to the mosques on Friday... we share it among them for safety measures when they are driving.

- App-based driver and union leader

...There's driver exploitation from Uber and Lyft...drivers are struggling with this. The unity we want motivated us to show support for our fellow drivers. Then they know, if we are united, we can achieve a lot. We would be looking after each other.

- App-based driver

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Work Experiences: Maritime Workers

Being on the verge of a mental breakdown because of being separated from family and emotional support for unknown amount of time until a relief can be found does not qualify as reason for leave. **A contact number for mental health or chaplain is worthless when we all know having a time together with our emotional support is the only cure.** Further adding insult to the emotional trauma is seeing our restricted to ship pay renegotiated to one-third of that was agreed in the union rules

Mariners feel like numbers on a spreadsheet pushed around to get the mission done, not people with lives of their own. We understand that it is a difficult time, but a little outreach from the shoreside office would go a long way.

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Local experiences of the Public Health Workforce during COVID-19



Survey of 278 Public Health—Seattle & King County employees



15% had scores indicating major depression disorder is likely



63% had scores indicating higher than average stress



7% had scores indicating unhealthy stress

Source: <https://www.sandforline.com/bsa/bsa/10.1080/1555246.2023.2166057>

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Compared to all King County Workers, Public Health workers reported...

 Higher Stress	 Loss of boundaries
 Higher perceived safety of work environment, and access to resources	 Much lower work/life balance
 Increased workload	 Increased disparities among women

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**Question for the Viewers**

*What policies, practices, or resources would help improve your mental health in the workplace?*

- A. Access to free mental health counseling
- B. A shorter work week
- C. Opportunities for social connection
- D. Courses or trainings on how to support your mental health
- E. Other (please type in chat)

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**Improving Workplace Mental Health and Wellbeing**



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### Why should workplaces prioritize mental health & wellbeing?

Poor mental health of a workforce is related to...

- Increased risk of injury
- Poor decision-making
- Reduced productivity
- Presenteeism
- Reduced physical capability for daily functioning
- Increased turn over
- More challenging for workplace to recruit

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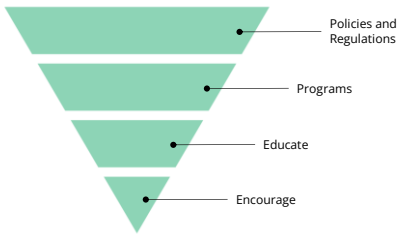
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### Improving Workplace well-being



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### Positive Interventions for the Public Health Workforce



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Policies and Regulations

There are lots of potential polices and regulations...

- ✓ Limits on hours worked
- ✓ Guaranteed sick leave/mental health leave
- ✓ Paid family leave
- ✓ 4-day work week!
- ✓ Remote work options

What regulations or policies would help your mental health?

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Health-Enhancing Program Example: Mentoring

I have two mentees who have changed my life. It entices me to want to be the best and share experiences while working on what you're passionate about with women who feel the same. This has made our bond indescribable.

- Rose, Mentor

Hearing the things my mentee experiences and getting her perspective on them has really helped enrich my own life. I look forward to our check-ins because I learn something from her and about her every time. It is inspiring to see the empowerment that she embodies. This experience has been very rich!

- Korri, Mentor

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Other Examples from Our Work

- ✓ Unions can provide services for workers to directly and indirectly support mental health (Ex. Driver's Union, EMT Union)
- ✓ Supports for remote workers
- ✓ Opportunities for social connection

What programs have benefitted you or your workplace?

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Educate



- Seminars
- Trainings
- Awareness
- Creating a culture that is mental health positive

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Encourage

Relying on individuals to change behaviors is not only challenging, but likely to be low impact:

- Diet, exercise, sleep
- Mindfulness
- Seek mental healthcare



All effective, but **require individual motivations** to sustain

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Key Takeaways

- The workplace is an important determinant of mental health
- The workplace can impact our mental health in both negative and positive ways
- Policies, regulations, and programs are often more effective than individual-level changes
- Individual-level interventions are less effective, as they place the burden of responsibility on the worker
- Mentorship programs, paid sick and mental health leave policies, and flexible working arrangements are examples of policies and programs that can support worker mental health and wellbeing

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Questions for the group

- ? In what ways is mental health being addressed, or not, in your workplace?
- ? What are the most common mental health challenges you experience at work?
- ? What kinds of organizational changes and improvements would make you feel more supported at work?

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A Chat with Marissa Baker and Lily Monsey



Sue Grinnell



Marissa Baker



Lily Monsey

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QUESTIONS?



To ask a question, please click the  icon in the Zoom toolbar to open your Q&A Pod.

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Resources

How public health can make a difference in the way we feel at work  
<https://sph.washington.edu/news-events/sph-blog/how-public-health-can-make-a-difference-at-work>

Determinants of stress, depression, quality of life, and intent to leave in Washington State emergency medical technicians during COVID-19  
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9377359/>

How does gender and work location impact perceived worker stress during COVID-19? Findings from King County, WA  
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/15555240.2023.2166057>

Northwest Center for Occupational Health Safety  
<https://deohs.washington.edu/nwcohs/>

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Marissa Baker  
 bakermg@uw.edu



Lily Monsey  
 lilymm04@uw.edu

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