Preventing Psychological Harm in Long-Term Care: Root Cause Analysis

The Preventing Psychological Harm in Long-Term Care Root Cause Analysis (LTC RCA) Report is the result of a joint workshop conducted by the Public Services Health and Safety Association (PSHSA) and the Ontario Centres for Learning, Research and Innovation at the Schlegel-UW Research Institute for the Aging. The workshop took a collaborative approach and brought together industry and subject matter experts across the province to share insights and expertise.

The LTC RCA was created using the results of this workshop and other compiled research to identify workplace factors that lead to psychological harm in long-term care and propose solutions to mitigate risk.

WHAT ARE THE CAUSES OF PSYCHOLOGICAL HARM IN LONG-TERM CARE?

Six workplace psychosocial factors were used in the report as primary causal factors of psychological harm in long-term care:

1. Workload management

2. Psychological demands

3. Protection from moral distress

4. Clear leadership and expectations

5. Organizational culture

6. Psychological protection

These factors were then used to identify the secondary and tertiary causal factors leading to psychological harm, including:

- Staffing shortages
- Recruitment and retention
- Lack of funding
- Ratio of staff to residents
- Physical and cognitive abilities of staff
- Resident complexity of care
- Job demands outweigh worker competencies
- Communication
- Psychological health and safety not integrated into work
- Turnover

WHAT SOLUTIONS HAVE BEEN PROPOSED TO PREVENT PSYCHOLOGICAL HARM?

The workshop participants identified several key focus areas to prevent psychological harm, including:

- **System-level processes and/or resources —** Revise provincial processes and resources.
- **Education and training —** Standardize situational, experienced-based content in formal education programs and workplace training.
- **Workplace resources —** Ensure equipment, technology, and materials are available and accessible, with an environment designed to support worker mental health.
- **Work arrangements and compensation —** Provide flexible work hours, scheduling, and total compensation packages to meet individual and operational needs.
- **Staff engagement and involvement —** Gather frequent and meaningful staff input, participation, and engagement.
- **Resident care —** Identify, understand, and provide holistic resident care using a collaborative, participatory approach.
- **Career progression and growth —** Support workers' careers through career roadmaps, position-specific development plans, and mentorship programs.
- **Role clarity, work assignment, and responsibilities —** Identify, document, and communicate roles and responsibilities of long-term care stakeholders that lead to quality resident care and staff wellbeing.
- **Job demands —** Identify job demands and design work to reduce cognitive, physical, and psychological load.
- **Workplace policies and procedures —** Develop and implement formal policies and procedures for workplace psychological health and safety.
- **Community interaction —** Enhance public facing communication and community programs. And partnerships to increase visibility and reduce stigma.

Outlined in the report, the above key focus areas all include proposed and possible solutions for workplaces to consider.

WHAT IS THE NEXT STEP?

You can learn more about preventing psychological harm in long-term care by reading the full root cause analysis report available on our website.

Read the report here.