

Workplace Conditions in Community Social Services

- Urgent client needs can unintentionally push safety systems down the priority list
- Research shows workers in non-profit social services may not identify the same hazards as external observers
- Repeated exposure reshapes risk perception and normalizes hazards

Source: Kosny, A.A., Hazards of Helping: Work, Mission and Risk in Non-Profit Social Service Organizations (University of Toronto, 2006)

Key Hazards (as outlined by WorkSafeBC)

- Inadequate OHS programs
- Unsafe physical environments
- Lack of equipment or personal protective equipment (PPE)
- Inadequate communication about health and safety

Common System Gaps

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- Informal onboarding instead of structured safety orientation
- Verbal updates instead of documented procedures
- Limited pre-outreach risk assessment
- Inconsistent documentation of aggressive incidents
- Unclear near-miss reporting
- Irregular review of safety data

Commonly Normalized Hazards

- Verbal aggression that is accepted as frustration instead of recognized as a hazard
- Exposure to unregulated substances treated as unavoidable environmental condition
- Entering private residences alone without structured safety planning
- Overexertion and extended shifts
- Chronic understaffing that leads to skipped breaks and fatigue
- Limited follow-up after unsafe or threatening interactions

Underreporting: A Consequence of Normalized Hazards

- Low incident numbers can hide real risks
- Patterns remain invisible
- Environmental hazards persist
- Training gaps go unidentified
- Preventive strategies are delayed
- Reporting makes risks visible and measurable

Roles & Responsibilities

Employers

- Maintain a comprehensive OHS program
- Provide clear, accessible reporting systems
- Allocate resources for training and safety-compliant equipment
- Train all staff, including managers and supervisors
- Review incident, injury, and near-miss data regularly
- Communicate procedures clearly, consistently, and promptly
- Allocate protected time for completing report forms

Managers/Supervisors

- Ensure staff understand hazards and safety procedures
- Encourage reporting of hazards and near-misses
- Address concerns promptly in consultation with JOHSC
- Provide timely follow-up after reports
- Discuss safety trends and seek worker feedback

Employees

- Follow established safety procedures
- Use provided equipment properly
- Report hazards, near-misses, and unsafe conditions
- Participate in safety training and discussions
- Support colleagues who raise concerns

Joint Occupational Health & Safety Committees (JOHSC)

- Monitor trends in incident and hazard reports
- Conduct inspections and risk assessments
- Consult workers about emerging risks
- Recommend preventive improvements

For detailed information on formal OHS responsibilities, refer to [WorkSafeBC's Roles, rights & responsibilities](#).