# Vulnerability in the Workplace

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# Today's focus…

***Vulnerability*** in the **Workplace**

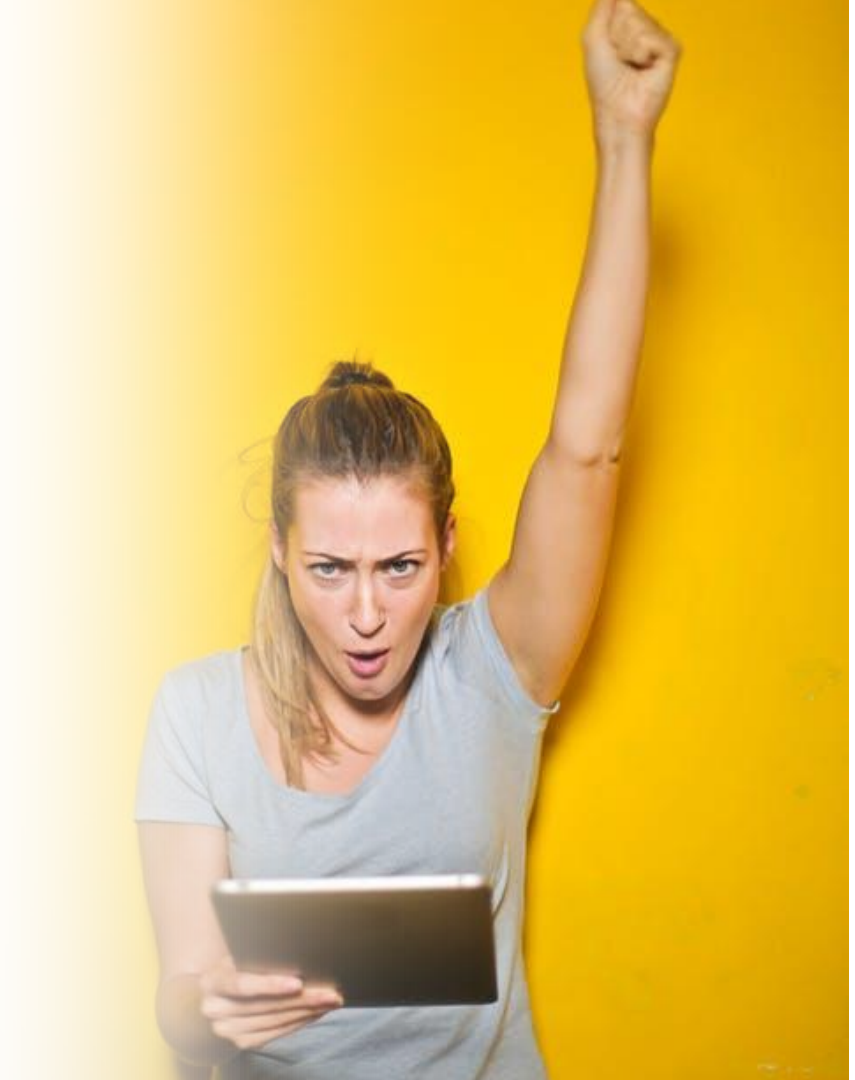
# Today's Plan

- Define *Vulnerability*
- Consider *Research*
- Review the *Survey*
- Discuss *Implications*

# Let's Talk: Vulnerability

**“I’ve got this!”**

Discuss for 2-3 minutes the factors that allow for that confident “I’ve got this” feeling **at work**



# Let's Talk: Vulnerability

NOW think about those other times . . . Where we may not feel as confident!

Discuss for 2-3 minutes why you might feel this way **at work**.

# Vulnerability Causes?

Related to several different factors

- Degree of hazard
- Physical surroundings
- Physical state
- Mental state
- Cognitive abilities
- Background
- Cultural factors

# Vulnerability

In the occupational health and safety world:

***“An increased risk of experiencing a work-related injury or illness compared to a given standard”***

# Research

Institute for Work & Health

Research Excellence Advancing Employee Health

- Independent, not-for-profit research organization
- Toronto, Ontario
- Goal: “to protect and improve the health and safety of working people”
- Research in two key areas:
  - Preventing work-related injury and illness, and
  - Promoting recovery and work functioning following injury and illness
- 30 years, well-respected internationally

# Research

- Measures the extent to which a worker may be vulnerable to OHS risks at work.

- “Rather than lumping people together with *Vulnerable Worker* labels, let’s see if we can figure out what specifically causes them to be vulnerable at work, and how can we use that information to reduce workplace injury?”

- **Peter Smith**, Ron Saunders, Marni Lifshen, Ollie Black, Morgan Lay, Curtis Breslin, Anthony La Montagne, Emile Tompa

# What did the researchers do?

- Reviewed the research literature
- Held focus groups
- Determined **four** aspects of workplace that impacted worker vulnerability
- Developed and refined survey questions
- Tested survey

# What did the researchers find?

**4 Workplace Factors** that impacted worker vulnerability:

1. Hazard exposure
2. Workplace policies and procedures
3. Worker awareness of hazards, rights and responsibilities
4. Worker empowerment to participate in injury/illness prevention

# Research Findings: Hazard Exposure

How often is a worker exposed to hazards such as:

- The use of dangerous equipment or materials,
- Work in dangerous locations,
- Undertaking work activities where there is a potential for injury.

# Research Findings: Policies & Procedures

Ensuring OHS procedures and policies are in place to protect workers

- Worker training and education,
- Labelling of workplace hazardous materials,
- The provision of safety equipment
- Procedures to identify and replace defective equipment,
- Incident reporting procedures

# Research Findings: Worker Awareness

Worker awareness of hazards, and OHS rights and responsibilities.

*Understanding **WHY**, in many instances, serves as a motivator to work safely!*

# Research Findings: Worker Empowerment

Worker empowerment to participate in injury and illness prevention.

*OHS Participation: Work refusals, asking questions, providing recommendations, properly using PPE.*

# Research Findings

Workers are most vulnerable when exposed to **hazards** in the workplace **IN COMBINATION WITH** one or more of the following:

- low OHS awareness and/or
- inadequate policies and procedures and/or
- low empowerment

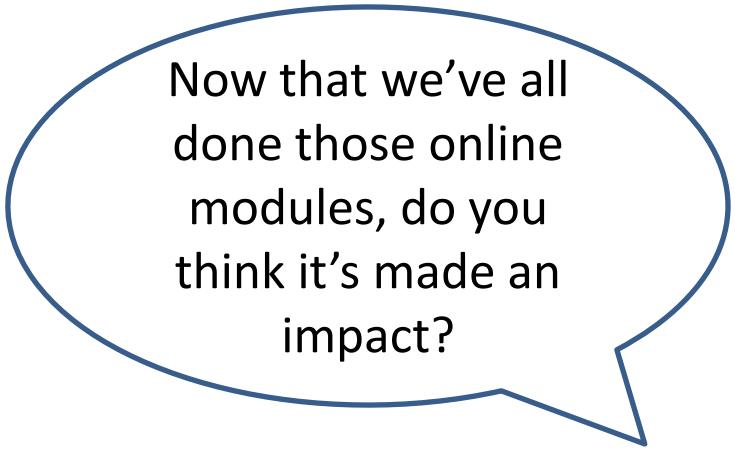
# Why measure vulnerability?

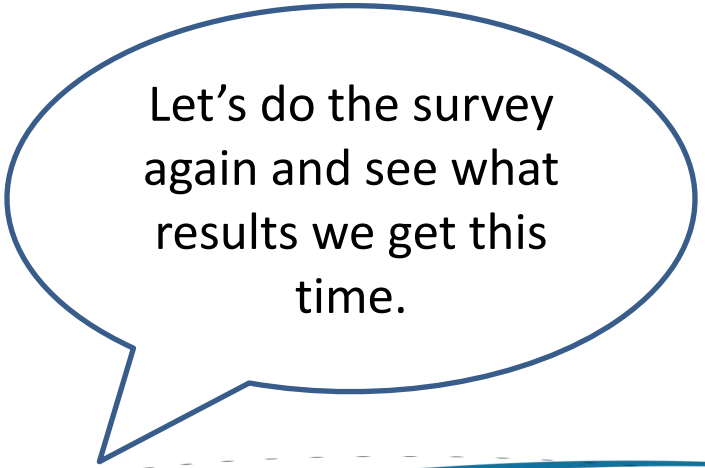
*"Measuring factors that place workers at increased risk of injury is a more proactive approach to injury prevention than waiting for injuries to occur and then taking action."*

*- Peter Smith*

# How/when to use the Survey

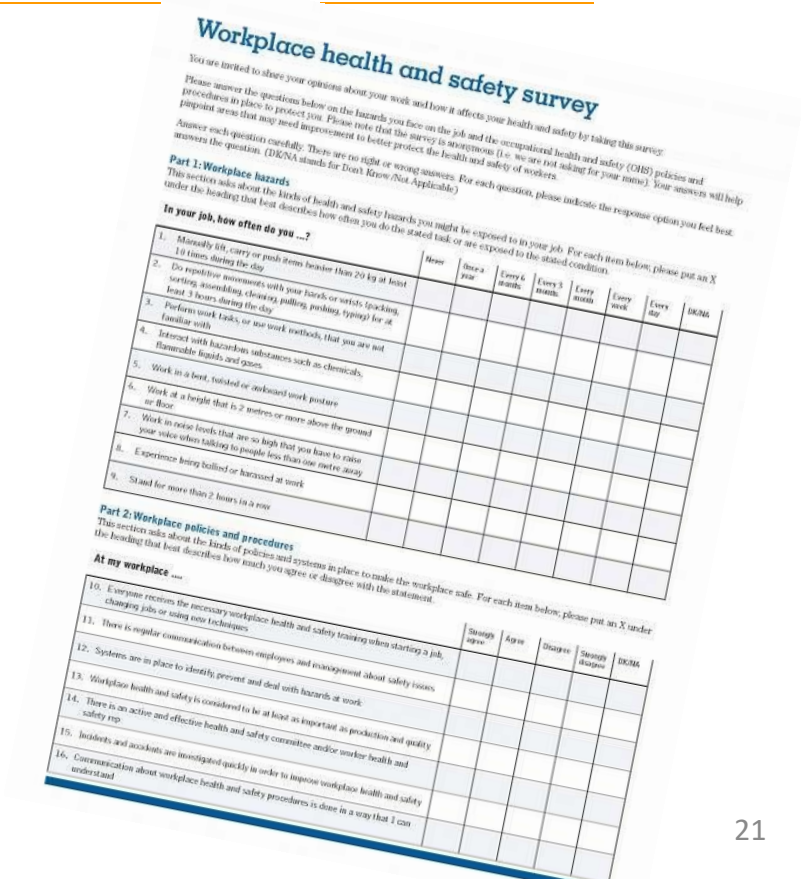
- Initially, to gain information
- Periodically, to measure change



# What can employers do to help?

By asking workers throughout the organization to fill out the survey, they can identify and address areas of potential vulnerability to help prevent future injuries and illnesses.



Workplace health and safety survey

You are invited to share your opinions about your work and how it affects your health and safety by taking this survey.

Please answer the questions below on the hazards you face on the job and the occupational health and safety (OHS) policies and procedures in place to protect you. Please note that the survey is anonymous (i.e. we are not asking for your name). Your answers will help pinpoint areas that may need improvement to better protect the health and safety of workers.

Answer each question carefully. There are no right or wrong answers. For each question, please indicate the response option you feel best answers the question. (DK/NA stands for Don't Know/Not Applicable)

**Part 1: Workplace hazards**

This section asks about the kinds of health and safety hazards you might be exposed to in your job. For each item below, please put an X under the heading that best describes how often you do the stated task or are exposed to the stated condition.

**In your job, how often do you ...?**

| | Never | Once a year | Every 6 months | Every 3 months | Every month | Every week | Every day | DK/NA |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Manually lift, carry or push items heavier than 20 kg at least 10 times during the day | | | | | | | | |
| 2. Do repetitive movements with your hands or wrists (packing, sorting, assembling, cleaning, pulling, pushing, typing) for at least 3 hours during the day | | | | | | | | |
| 3. Perform work tasks, or use work methods, that you are not familiar with | | | | | | | | |
| 4. Interact with hazardous substances such as chemicals, flammable liquids and gases | | | | | | | | |
| 5. Work in a bent, twisted or awkward work posture | | | | | | | | |
| 6. Work at a height that is 2 metres or more above the ground or floor | | | | | | | | |
| 7. Work in noise levels that are so high that you have to raise your voice when talking to people less than one metre away | | | | | | | | |
| 8. Experience being bullied or harassed at work | | | | | | | | |
| 9. Stand for more than 2 hours in a row | | | | | | | | |

**Part 2: Workplace policies and procedures**

This section asks about the kinds of policies and systems in place to make the workplace safe. For each item below, please put an X under the heading that best describes how much you agree or disagree with the statement.

**At my workplace ....**

| | Strongly agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly disagree | DK/NA |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 10. Everyone receives the necessary workplace health and safety training when starting a job, changing jobs or using new techniques | | | | | |
| 11. There is regular communication between employees and management about safety issues | | | | | |
| 12. Systems are in place to identify, prevent and deal with hazards at work | | | | | |
| 13. Workplace health and safety is considered to be at least as important as production and quality | | | | | |
| 14. There is an active and effective health and safety committee and/or worker health and safety rep | | | | | |
| 15. Incidents and accidents are investigated quickly in order to improve workplace health and safety | | | | | |
| 16. Communication about workplace health and safety procedures is done in a way that I can understand | | | | | |

# Completing the Survey

*Workers are to fill this survey out anonymously*

- **Part 1** asks how often a worker does certain tasks or experiences certain conditions

- **Part 2, 3 & 4** ask the worker about three types of resources that may lesson hazard exposure
  - **OHS policies & procedures, OHS awareness, and OHS empowerment.**

# Survey Assessment

***Step 1:*** Determine if workers are exposed to hazards

***Step 2:*** Assess the adequacy of resources to lesson the effects of hazard exposure

***Step 3:*** Use the results to pinpoint areas for OHS improvement

# Decreasing Workplace Vulnerability

**What steps can we take to decrease workplace vulnerability?**

**IN GROUPS:**

**Identify 3-4 potential areas of vulnerability for the worker you've been assigned.**

**Choose one, and outline 1-2 ideas to mitigate the challenges.**

# How can workplaces support ALL workers?

- Be approachable, be accessible; “actively” check in
- Communicate safety as often as possible (posters, training, safe work practices, best practices, education)
- Build a feeling of ownership (“Around here, we value…”)
- Encourage safe work practices and “fix” poor work habits
- Ensure workers know “who to ask”
- Make safety a priority and create a **positive** safety culture!

# Questions?

For any additional information

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