

Policy Implications of Research Findings¹

Center for Work, Health, & Well-being, 2011-2019



Background: Workers' health, safety, and well-being are shaped by policies at the public level, but also by policies designed by the organization in which they work. Designing policies based on scientific research at these two levels is challenging as research is costly, and links between scientific evidence and policy-making are not straightforward. The Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health Center for Work, Health, and Well-being is a Total Worker Health® (TWH) Center of Excellence that conducts research focused on policies, programs and practices at the workplace and how they are related to health and well-being outcomes as well as outcomes at the organizational level, such as worker turnover. As part of the Center's mission to translate research to practice, its Policy Working Group conducted a literature review of the Center's work to identify implications for organizational and public policy that will inform policy decisions and identify priorities for future research.

Methods: Two researchers conducted a thorough review and analysis of 32 of the Center's publications from 2011 to 2019 to identify cross-cutting themes that focus on working conditions or related health outcomes and their organizational and public policy implications. The publications included in this review were limited to those involving analysis of an association between aspects of the work environment and health outcomes. The publications were from studies in the healthcare and construction industries, thus limiting the generalizability of findings to other working populations.

Results: Twelve cross-cutting themes were identified with their respective organizational and public policy implications. The cross-cutting themes fit under two umbrella topics that reflect the majority of the center's research: *working conditions* (e.g., social support, safety practices) and related *health outcomes* (e.g., mental health, physical activity). There are notable overlaps as shared pathways of certain working conditions can affect multiple health outcomes. See the chart on the reverse side for an abbreviated summary of the results of this review.

Conclusions: Identification of evidence-based policy recommendations that support the health, safety, and well-being of workers as well as organizations is an essential part of a Total Worker Health® approach, informing priorities and identifying gaps to address in future research. Dissemination of findings and translation into best practices for implementation are integral components of TWH research. This review and analysis of our Center's work may serve as a model for other researchers considering the policy implications of their own work.

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¹ For more information and specific research findings, please see the paper on which this is based: Gómez MAL, Sparer-Fine E, Sorensen G, Wagner G. Literature Review of Policy Implications from Findings of the Center for Work, Health and Well-being. *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine* 61(11):868-876, November 2019.

Examples of Policy Implications from Center Findings

Focus of Center Papers	Implications Based on Center's Work	
Working Conditions	Organizational Policy	Public Policy
Ergonomic Practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Policies to improve ergonomic practices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Policies to improve ergonomic practices
Harassment and abuse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Policies to prevent abuse, harassment, discrimination, and violence ▪ Policies to build respect for the ideas, values, and beliefs of others ▪ Building shared responsibility of violent acts through processes in which workers discuss constructive strategies to change the situation and prevent future occurrences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Zero-tolerance policy toward workplace harassment and abuse by agencies at the local, state and federal levels
Safety practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Policies that support positive safety practices and improve communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Policies to support positive safety practices
Social support (supervisor and/or coworker)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Policies that hold supervisors accountable for taking actions that support their employees ▪ Policies and trainings that aim to prevent abuse, harassment, discrimination, and violence, and that encourage employees and supervisors to build respect for the ideas, values, and beliefs of others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Regulations and/or standards for psychosocial factors
Staffing level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Regular assessment of staffing adequacy ▪ Policies to evaluate and address the extent to which job demands are aligned with resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Staffing ratio regulations
Work-family conflict	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Scheduling policies to reduce work-family conflict ▪ Discourage stigmatization and/or sanctioning of workers for exercising control of their schedules 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Scheduling regulations
Work schedules	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Scheduling policies ▪ Break policy consistently enforced 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Scheduling regulations
Work stress/Job demands/ Decision making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Regular review of job responsibilities to ensure appropriate work load ▪ Changes in job demands and shift scheduling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Scheduling regulations and/or standards ▪ In Healthcare: regulations requiring measurement of nurse-to-patient ratios to assess job demands
Health Outcomes	Organizational Policy	Public Policy
Injuries and injury reporting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Procedures that allow for easy reporting of injuries and that also prohibit retaliation of injury reports ▪ Data-driven surveillance systems that can capture distribution and disparities of injuries within the workplace ▪ Implementation of policies in diverse populations should be responsive to disparities present in the targeted population 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reporting regulations and/or standards ▪ Create surveillance systems for occupational injuries that segregate by occupation, type of work and context
Mental health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Policies that contribute to a psychologically safe and healthy environment ▪ Implement an internal monitoring system that is able to capture psychological hazards at the workplace ▪ Policies that allow for easy access to mental health resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Policies that protect workers against psychological hazards created by economic changes ▪ Policies that make employers accountable in the protection of workers against psychological hazards at the workplace
Physical activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Policies to evaluate and address the extent to which job demands are aligned with resources ▪ Implement integrated interventions that target improvements in physical activity and other outcomes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Policies that support healthy lifestyle habits such as tobacco cessation, healthy diets, reduction of alcohol abuse, and improvement in sleep habits
Sleep deficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Scheduling policies designed to protect sleep cycles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Scheduling regulations