

The Issue

How aware workers are of factors in their workplace that may impact work health and safety has been identified as an area of interest in the Australian Work Health and Safety Strategy 2012–2022 under the action area of *Leadership and culture: Leadership in communities and organisations to promote a positive culture for health and safety*.

The Study

This research brief provides information on mindfulness relating to work health and safety among Australian businesses and workers as measured by the Perceptions of Work Health and Safety Survey 2012. In the context of work health and safety, mindfulness is the conscious awareness of factors that affect or may affect work health and safety in the workplace. This brief includes three measures of mindfulness: *What do businesses count on; preoccupation with failure and sensitivity to operations*.

Sample

The survey includes responses from 1052 employers, 520 sole traders and 1311 workers. The data were weighted to produce national estimates of the number of businesses and workers in Australia that hold particular attitudes and perceptions about work health and safety. Due to the low response rate obtained for these surveys we cannot be confident that the information is representative of the whole population.

Main findings

Across the three measures of mindfulness

Overall there were generally high levels of mindfulness across worker groups in terms of what businesses count on, sensitivity to operations and preoccupation with failure. Differences were present according to industry and occupation groups across worker types.

Employers operating in the Health care and social assistance industry tended to have the lowest levels of mindfulness in terms of what they count on in their business, preoccupation with failure and sensitivity to operations compared to the other priority industries. Sole traders working as Labourers also displayed high levels of mindfulness across the three measures.

Preoccupation with failure

While businesses and workers all had high levels of agreement that when something unexpected occurs they always try to figure out why things didn't go as expected, agreement was much lower for businesses actively looking for failures and trying to understand them.

Employers in Manufacturing, Transport, postal and warehousing and Construction did appear to support both proactive and reactive approaches to work health and safety failures, with sole traders in the Manufacturing industry also supporting both approaches. Workers in these industries tended to favour the reactive approach.

Sensitivity to operations

Figure 1 shows that employers operating in the Accommodation and food services, Transport, postal and warehousing and Construction industries displayed consistently high levels of mindfulness with regard to sensitivity to operations in their workplace.

Figure 1: Employer sensitivity to operations by industry



* Public administration and safety not shown due to very small numbers of survey respondents.

Comparing mindfulness across worker type

Employers had a higher level of agreement for the business actively looking for failures of all sizes and tries to understand them (65%) compared to workers and sole traders (57% each).

Workers were less likely to agree that workers are rewarded if they report potential trouble spots (24% workers and 35% employers).

A more detailed report on these findings is available at www.swa.gov.au.