



WORK-RELATED WELLBEING

What good looks like for construction workers

Factors which protect workers' wellbeing are important to consider when developing mentally healthy work. Too many New Zealanders suffer ill-health as a result of work.

WorkSafe New Zealand has carried out research to understand what work-related factors are perceived to contribute most to the wellbeing of New Zealand workers across different industry and worker groups. WorkSafe has developed this information to guide businesses in the design of initiatives to support mentally healthy work, and demonstrate the benefits of this for workers, businesses, whānau, and the wider community.

The findings from this research reflect the views of those participants who were invited and opted to participate in the study. This advice is a starting point.

A more detailed summary of the research approach and general findings can be found [here](#).

Construction sector workers included in the research represented a range of roles including rigging, roofing, residential construction, project management, commercial development building contractor, and building supply sales. Roles ranged from low skilled workers to mid-level management. The following section highlights things an organisation can change in their immediate environment.

Protective factors of work-related wellbeing for construction workers

Work-life balance

- Workers appreciate feeling genuinely supported by their employer to manage their wellbeing and work-life balance. When workers have a good work-life balance, this helps them to feel better at work as well as at home and can be positively mutually reinforcing.

“When things are going well at work, your relationship’s strong, and when your relationship is strong, you can deal with work better. You’re healthier and more positive. It goes full circle.”

- Workers appreciate having manageable workloads and achievable deadlines, and clarity from management in advance regarding any potential for long hours and tight deadlines. This helps to reduce the likelihood of workers experiencing exhaustion and stress, particularly where the work is highly physical.

Interpersonal relationships

- Working in teams with strong interpersonal relationships and a positive company culture helps construction workers to feel happy and included at work.

- Good interpersonal relationships, particularly between foremen and management, can help to minimise verbal and physical confrontations and the impacts of aggressive behaviour in the workplace.
- Knowing work is positively impacting on the community and making a difference to peoples' lives is important.

“Our team is quite closely knitted so no-one feels left out – all those guys in the picture working together. We have a good culture. People are well looked after, and everyone enjoys working together and feels happy at work.”

- Those working in teams with diversity such as gender, ethnic, cultural and age diversity are very positive about this and express that it is a source of pride.

Recognition and reward

- Construction workers have a strong sense of pride associated with completing projects, particularly when they are delivered on time and to budget.
- Workers find completing complex and challenging projects or projects which benefit communities is rewarding.

“So the responsibility is all on me.. It’s a lot of work. But I’m also really proud that it’s all done by me.”

- Workers are typically well-paid, particularly during a boom cycle in the sector. This helps workers to feel valued and recognised for the work they do.

“The government contribute positively to wellbeing by... keeping the pressure on (employers) to make sure we are fairly paid.”

- The competitive nature of the industry can be motivating for some workers.

“The competitiveness can make it fun sometimes. In the right situation it can drive you and motivate you.”

Support

- Workers appreciate transparency and support from employers regarding job security, particularly during downturns within the construction sector.

“People like to feel as though there is a future... You never know how long the boom is going to last.”

- Having support available to receive budgeting advice and build money management skills (for example, via the services of an Employee Assistance Programme) can help workers plan ahead and reduce the stress associated with fluctuations in income levels.

“When the boys are working big hours, they get used to the lifestyle... then all of a sudden they can go back to working almost part-time but you’re used to all that money you were making. Some of the boys who are not good at saving can do things a bit tough during those down times.”

Organisational culture

- Construction workers highlighted the importance of an organisational culture that actively promotes health and safety.
- Workplaces where workers and supervisors are aware of and adhere to health and safety regulations, and where actions are taken to improve health and safety help workers to feel physically safe at work.

“The law contributes to my sense of health. It’s around health and safety, not being forced to do things that are possibly going to put you at risk.”

- Workers also appreciate having good health and safety information available when working with new building materials, and time to understand this information.

Role expectations

- Workers express that physical work requiring a high level of fitness and strength was generally good for their health, including their mental wellbeing. However, excessive levels of physical work and long hours can lead to exhaustion and stress.

“There’s lots of lifting, lots of climbing involved, which has benefits in itself. The role involves me being really active so that’s got to be a good thing for my health.”