

MOANAROA MANA OLA
INTERDISCIPLINARY PACIFIC HEALTH RESEARCH CONFERENCE

Psychosocial Work Risks, Cultural Contexts, and Pacific Well-being

Towards a Pacific Research Agenda

WORK IS A PACIFIC HEALTH ISSUE

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THE EMPLOYMENT PARADOX

What happens when employment provides an income—but gradually undermines well-being?

A job can provide income, stability, identity and purpose—while also producing stress, insecurity and exhaustion.

Employment can be both a social determinant of health and a source of health inequality.

THE OVERLOOKED RESEARCH GAP

Psychosocial work risks remain peripheral in Pacific health research.

Pacific health research has rightly examined:

Healthcare • Housing • Income • Education • Culture • Family

But less attention has been given to:

Work demands • Control • Security • Voice • Organisational support

What is missed when the workplace is treated as background?

WHAT ARE PSYCHOSOCIAL WORK RISKS?

They are produced by how work is organised and managed.

- Unpredictable hours
- Excessive demands
- Employment insecurity
- Limited control
- Weak organisational support
- Lack of voice or respect

These are conditions of work—not simply individual feelings or failures to cope.

Psychosocial risks are properties of work design, management practices and workplace relationships.

WHY THE PACIFIC EXPERIENCE MAY BE DIFFERENT

One job may sustain the well-being of many.

A finding from my PhD research:

Some Pasifika bus drivers felt insufficiently valued and cared for during the pandemic. Yet leaving was not realistic because families and wider networks depended on their income.

They continued public-facing work while carrying both health risks and responsibility for providing for others.

Wider responsibilities can limit a worker's freedom to leave, reduce hours or speak up.

A CULTURAL INTERPRETATION

**Cultural strengths can protect—
but they can also be misread.**

Pacific culture can strengthen:

Belonging • Identity • Loyalty • Collective responsibility • Social support

Organisations should not interpret:

Loyalty as satisfaction • Patience as acceptance

Silence as consent • Responsibility as unlimited availability

**Cultural commitment should be recognised and reciprocated through
responsible leadership, genuine care and healthy working conditions.**

A CONNECTED SYSTEM OF WELL-BEING

Current frameworks may stop at the worker.
The effects do not.

WORKING CONDITIONS

Demands • Control • Security • Voice • Support

→ CWORKER WELL-BEING

Stress • Exhaustion • Dignity • Health

→ FAMILY AND COMMUNITY

Relationships • Caregiving • Financial stability • Participation

Research must capture how effects travel through this connected system.

TOWARDS A PACIFIC RESEARCH AGENDA

Four principles for a Pacific research agenda.

- LISTEN** Begin with lived experiences and Pacific knowledge.
- MEASURE** Assess effects on workers, families and communities.
- CONNECT** Bring together health, employment, organisations and policy.
- SHARE POWER** Develop research with Pacific workers—not simply about them.

The research approach must reflect the relational nature of Pacific well-being.

QUESTIONS FOR RESEARCH

Four questions should guide the next step.

1 **EXPERIENCE**

How are psychosocial risks experienced across occupations and employment arrangements?

2 **CONSEQUENCES**

How do workplace effects travel through families and communities?

3 **PROTECTION**

Which organisational practices protect individual and collective well-being?

4 **PARTICIPATION**

How can Pacific workers help design culturally relevant measures and solutions?

SUPPORT ONE WORKER, STRENGTHEN AN ENTIRE NETWORK

Research that understands Pacific workers relationally can support healthier workplaces, stronger families and stronger communities.

**Better evidence • Culturally responsive practice
Healthier work • Stronger Pacific communities**

When organisations care for one Pacific worker, their impact may extend across an entire network.

The background features a deep blue gradient on the left, transitioning into a series of flowing, wavy lines in lighter blue and teal. On the right side, there are intricate, golden-yellow patterns, including a checkered or woven texture and a series of parallel, slightly curved lines. The overall composition is modern and artistic.

Thank you