

Research Paper



# Returning to normalcy: an evidence-based overview of strategies for creating a psychologically safer workplace in Ghanaian health industry

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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** Psychological safety in the workplace is critical to staff well-being, yet health institutions in Ghana face resource constraints and structural challenges that may undermine efforts to sustain a psychologically safe working environment.

**Objective:** To explore health professionals' lived experiences, views, and strategies for creating a psychologically safer workplace within the Ghanaian health industry.

**Methods:** Qualitative phenomenological study using an exploratory research design. Participants were selected through purposive, non-probability sampling to capture lived experiences and perceptions of psychological safety in Ghanaian health institutions.

**Results:** Most health professionals were found to communicate politely with patients, and many institutions had established supportive systems and a culture of collegial camaraderie. However, financial resource constraints contributed to understaffing, outdated equipment, and inadequate support systems, generating frustration and tension. Allowance policies were perceived as favoring senior leaders and staff over junior employees, further undermining perceived psychological safety.

**Conclusion:** Creating a psychologically safe workplace in the Ghanaian health sector is a complex, ongoing process requiring assessment and diagnosis, leadership commitment and training, transparent communication, inclusive decision-making, skill development, and continuous monitoring, alongside dedicated support for staff mental health and well-being.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Over the last decade, there has been a growing realization of the importance of building a psychologically safer workplace across the global employment landscape. The rationale is that a psychologically secure workplace is critical for building a healthy work environment and improving employee well-being and productivity [1]. In consequence, as organizations attempt to foster open communication, creativity, and employee involvement, the concept of psychological safety has gained traction. [2], [3] Discovered that most institutions, particularly healthcare institutions in most developed countries, recognized the importance of creating a psychologically safe workplace; however, the practices have yet to gain traction in healthcare institutions worldwide.

Several institutions, including the American Psychological Association (APA), the British Psychological Society (BPS), and the Canadian Psychological Association (CPA), have described a psychologically safe workplace in various contexts over the years. According to [4], the APA defined a psychologically healthy workplace as one that fosters positive mental health, promotes a supportive work environment, and addresses psychological stressors. BPS, according to [5] stated that addressing variables such as workplace stress, organizational culture, and leadership styles contribute to the formation of a psychologically safe workplace. CPA, according to [6], a psychologically safe workplace comprises advocacy for work conditions that consider psychological well-being, reducing stigma around mental health, and promoting healthy mental health practices.

In the context of Ghana, fostering a psychologically safe workplace is critical for employee well-being and the effective delivery of health services: the country's fragile economy can create heightened financial insecurity and job uncertainty, contributing to elevated stress levels and decreasing psychological safety in the workplace. The nature of the work in healthcare institutions, dealing with sensitive and challenging health issues, underscores the need for a supportive and secure environment. Understanding the present state of psychological safety in various health sectors is critical for identifying gaps and adopting evidence-based improvement measures [7]. This study seeks to provide an evidence-based overview of strategies that can enhance psychological safety within the healthcare industry in Ghana, acknowledging the unique challenges and cultural nuances of the health landscape in the country.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

The study used a Qualitative Research Approach, especially a phenomenological research approach, and an exploratory research design to explore and comprehend individuals' lived experiences, views, and strategies for creating a safe psychological workplace. The study used the non-probability sampling method, which involved purposive sampling method to select participants for the study. Although psychological safety is not restricted to a certain organisation, job, or employee [8], our inquiry focused on an evidence-based overview of measures to improve psychological safety in Ghana's healthcare industry. To that aim, the investigation followed [9] advice, which indicates that while conducting such a study, a qualitative research approach and design that considers human experience are essential. To determine the sample size for the study, Ding, [10] claimed that numerous variables and factors affect the sample size: The sample size for well-defined factors should be between 5 and 10. To this extent, useful replies were received from eight human resource experts from Ghana's Mental Health Authorities. Face-to-face interview, focus groups discussion, and document analysis were used as data collection technique. Data gathered were categorized using themes such Supportive and Inclusive Organizational Culture for Improved Psychological Safety, Limited Resources and Inequitable Distribution Undermine Psychological Safety, And Policy-Induced Deterioration of Psychological Safety.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1 Sense of Safety and Well-Being Within the Work Environment

There were mixed reactions regarding the overall sense of safety and well-being within the Ghanaian health industry. The study identified three thematic areas Supportive and Inclusive Organizational Culture for Improved Psychological Safety, Limited Resources and Inequitable Distribution Undermine Psychological Safety, And Policy-Induced Deterioration of Psychological Safety.

#### 3.2 Supportive and Inclusive Organizational Culture for Improved Psychological Safety.

According to the survey, most of the Ghanaian health institutions has put in place excellent support systems, and there is a culture of camaraderie among colleagues that generates a reassuring work atmosphere. Safety is a top priority, and the health industry has established a welcoming environment. This highlights positive characteristics of organizational culture that contribute to a friendly work environment and reassures the atmosphere of good psychological support services. These findings concur with [11] findings, which suggest that an organization that prioritizes safety demonstrates a commitment to employee well-being and succeeds in establishing a good and supportive culture that can positively impact the well-being of its employees.

According to the report, the health industry culture is multi-faceted. On the one hand, the health industry culture assists people in achieving professional success, while on the other side, the health industry assists employees in achieving a sense of fulfilment and mental well-being. Its primary value is clear and transparent communication, which ensures that staff are informed about organizational changes, expectations, and growth possibilities. The findings are consistent with the findings of the [12] study, which show that positive organisational cultures with a diversified emphasis on professional achievement and personal well-being take a balanced approach to organisational priorities. The findings are also consistent with the [13] investigation. The major value of clear and open communication, according to the report, shows an organisation that seeks to keep its personnel informed, establishing a sense of transparency and confidence. In another development, leadership the health industry demonstrates empathy and constant support, recognizes, and respects employees' contributions, and fosters a positive team environment through collaborative projects and shared goals. This culture encourages diversity and inclusion, fostering an environment in which everyone feels valued and heard. The results are similar with [14], indicating a leadership style that values and recognises the individual worth of each team member. According to the report, encouraging diversity and inclusion promotes organisational culture by fostering an environment in which every person feels appreciated and heard, which can lead to higher employee engagement and satisfaction. Furthermore, within the health industry, work-life balance efforts, flexibility in work arrangements, and programmes encouraging physical and mental health all contribute to an organizational ethos that prioritizes the entire well-being of its members. This is consistent with the findings of [15], who discovered that prioritising a supportive and inclusive organisational culture not only allows professional success but also fosters the general well-being and fulfilment of its workforce. In turn, this method contributes to a better work environment, higher employee happiness, and potentially improved organisational performance.

#### 3.3 Limited Resources and Inequitable Distribution Undermine Psychological Safety

According to the survey, there is a lack of financial resources in the health industry, which has an impact on staff well-being, producing an environment of frustration and tension. Due to budget restrictions, the health industry frequently translates to insufficient worker levels, outmoded equipment, and poor support systems. The findings are consistent with those of [16], who found that employees' inability to access necessary resources can impede their ability to complete their duties, causing frustration as they delay in providing the best results within the constraints of limited resources. The findings also accord with that of [17].

According to the study, concerns such as insufficient resources, uneven policy execution, and limited professional development possibilities indicate systemic challenges that impair employees' overall

psychological safety. These findings emphasize the necessity of addressing organizational communication gaps and ensuring enough resources and policies to enhance employee well-being. The research showed disparities in the equitable distribution of the health industry's limited resources, which exacerbated workplace tensions. Employees believe that there is a lack of fairness or openness in how resources are allocated because of this. This has resulted in interpersonal confrontations, weakened team cohesion, and contributed to increased stress among professionals. The findings support those of [18], who found that a perception of unfairness and inequity in resource allocation can have a negative influence on healthcare personnel' morale, job satisfaction, and general psychological well-being.

### 3.4 Policy-Induced Deterioration of Psychological Safety

According to the results of the poll, most policies regarding staff allowances favour senior leaders and senior staff over junior employees. As a result, an organization's policy on allowances allocation favour senior leaders and management over junior employees.

For example, whether the senior staff or a management member owns a vehicle or not, they all receive 60 gallons of fuel each month. Junior employees, on the other hand, do not receive any fuel allowance, even though they have vehicles that they utilize for business purposes in the organization. The implication is that the junior staff's sense of safety and well-being is likely to be considerably affected. A disparity in allowance distribution fosters a sense of inequity and unfair treatment among junior staff members [19]. Employee morale and job satisfaction can suffer because of a lack of financial appreciation for their achievements. This mismatch not only has a financial impact, but it also produces a bad psychological climate, eroding trust in leadership and decreasing the general sense of safety inside the organization [20].

Furthermore, there is perceived favoritism towards top leaders and management, which has resulted in a sense of exclusion, impeding open communication, collaboration, and a shared commitment to organizational goals. As a result, the overall well-being of junior staff members is likely to suffer, as they may feel neglected and devalued, lowering their sense of security and contentment at work. The findings are similar with [21] findings that unequal distribution of allowances might contribute to a stressed working atmosphere, creating animosity and a lack of cohesiveness among team members.

### 3.5 Evidence-Based Strategies for Creating Psychologically Safer Workplace

The study acknowledged that creating a psychologically safe workplace is a complex and ongoing process that involves various stages. These stages are interconnected and require ongoing commitment and effort from leadership and employees. The study found eight (8) key stages to consider when creating a psychologically safe workplace. These stages covered Assessment and Diagnosis, Leadership Commitment and Training, Communication and Transparency, Inclusive Decision-Making, Feedback and Recognition, Training and Skill Development, Continuous Monitoring and Adaptation, and Support for Mental Health and Well-being. This aligns with [22] findings. According to the findings the establishment of a psychologically safe workplace involves a multifaceted process. It encompasses an initial assessment of the current workplace climate, securing unwavering commitment from leadership, fostering heightened communication, implementing targeted training initiatives, and maintaining a continuous cycle of monitoring and adaptive change. [22] Study underscores that the creation of psychological safety is not a one-time effort but an ongoing, dynamic endeavor. It necessitates a holistic and unwavering commitment from all organizational levels, ensuring a sustained and comprehensive dedication to fostering an environment where employees feel secure, valued, and empowered to contribute effectively. Figure 1 below Shows Strategies Employed in Creating a Safer Workplace Environment.

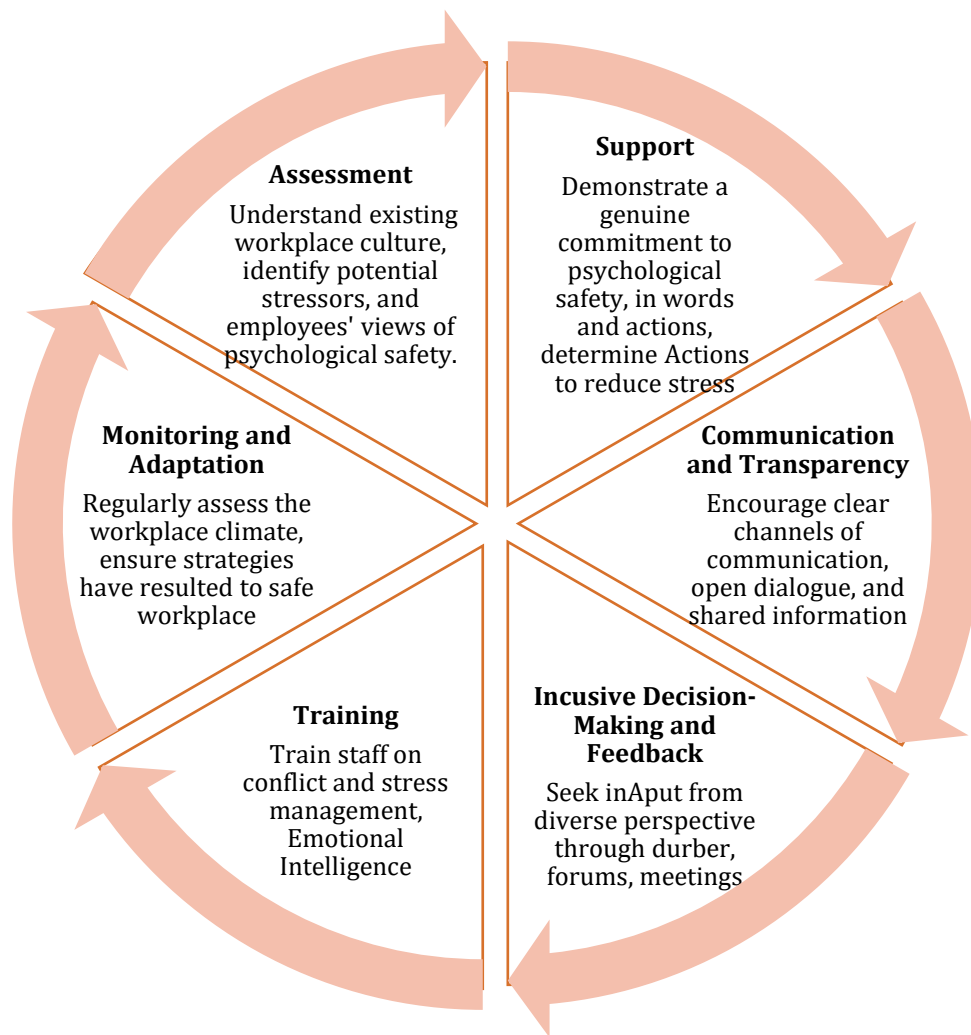


Figure 1. The Six-Stage Cycle for Creating a Psychologically Safer Workplace

### 3.6 Context of the Strategies for Creating a Safer Workplace Environment

#### 3.6.1 Assessment

Before implementing initiatives, it is critical to examine the current situation of the workplace. This requires the use of surveys, focus groups, and interviews to collect data to understand the current situation of the workplace. This stage serves two purposes: assists organizations in identifying their strengths, limitations, and areas for progress, and to understand the current culture, detect possible stresses, and assess employees' views of psychological safety. This validates [23] findings that conducting regular surveys to collect anonymous input on the organizational atmosphere, well-being initiatives, and areas for improvement is the fundamental of creating a meaningful psychological work environment.

#### 3.6.2 Leadership Commitment and Support

According to the study, leadership is critical in establishing a psychologically secure workplace. They must show a real commitment to psychological safety through their words and actions. Achieving leadership commitment requires organizations preparedness to provide leadership development programmes aiming to educate leaders to understand the value of empathy, active listening, and fostering an inclusive culture. Leaders who exhibit these characteristics set the tone for the entire organization [24]. The study also emerged that prioritizing psychological safety and well-being has a substantial impact on psychological safety. Organizations should offer tools, support systems, and programmes that manage stressors and encourage a good work-life balance. Psychological safety education programmes eliminate stigma and encourage employees to seek help when they as required. The study also found that creating a

psychologically safe environment necessitates enacting policies that promote work-life balance, such as flexible work arrangements, remote work options, reasonable workload expectations, and encouraging employees to take breaks, use paid time off, and prioritize self-care to reduce burnout and improve overall well-being. This is consistent with the findings of [25], who discovered that Employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs), the provision of confidential counselling and mental health resources, and employee support services create a conducive environment that resolves employee issues.

### **3.6.3 Communication and Transparency**

The health industry, according to the research, should develop clear communication lines, encourage open dialogue, and guarantee that information is shared honestly. Regular communication about organizational goals, changes, and issues aids in the development of trust. Leaders should also provide context for organizational changes and be clear about decision-making processes. To guarantee fairness and equity, health institutions should design and explain clear, open policies addressing resource allocation, allowances, and organizational changes. Regular communication channels, such as departmental meetings or newsletters, should be established to keep staff informed and involved, promoting a sense of transparency and confidence. These findings confirm the findings of [26], who found that open and transparent communication is a key component of psychological safety.

### **3.6.4 Inclusive Decision-Making and Feedback**

According to the report, inclusion is a vital component of psychological safety. In order to make inclusive decisions, it is necessary to collect feedback from diverse points of view. This can be achieved through collaborative methods, including employees in decision-making forums, and acknowledging contributions from individuals at all organisational levels. When choices are made jointly, employees experience a sense of belonging and ownership. Regular feedback, both positive and negative, helps employees understand how their efforts are valued and develops a culture that values different points of view. This approach motivates employees to be proud of their achievements and develops a sense of belonging. These findings match with [27] findings that positive feedback creates a growth mindset, embraces differences, and generates a sense of belonging for all employees.

### **3.6.5 Training on Conflict Resolution, and Emotional Intelligence**

Training in communication, conflict resolution, and emotional intelligence improves the abilities required to maintain a successful interpersonal relationship, which translates to maintaining a psychologically safe workplace. Employees should be able to handle interpersonal obstacles, grasp different points of view, and communicate effectively as a result of training programmes. Mediation services should be made available to help with conflict resolution and to ensure that concerns are addressed in a fair and constructive manner. The study also found that leadership training programmes should emphasize emotional intelligence, empathy, and supportive leadership practices. Providing leaders with the abilities to recognize and respond to their team members' emotional needs helps to develop a culture of understanding and a safe work environment. Employees who receive training in stress management, resilience, and coping methods may have a psychologically safer workplace. The findings agree with [28] that creating a safer working environment requires providing employees with knowledge to navigate challenging situations, as well as taking a proactive approach to mental health and well-being, emphasizing the importance of self-care and seeking help when needed [29].

### **3.6.6 Monitoring and Adaptation**

The study concluded that maintaining psychological safety is a continual process that necessitates constant monitoring and adaptation [30]. Regularly analyze the working climate, get employee feedback, and make improvements based on changing needs [31]. This stage entails remaining attentive to changes in the organizational environment and resolving emergent difficulties as they arise [32], [33].

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### Author Contributions Statement

| Name of Author    | C | M | So | Va | Fo | I | R | D | O | E | Vi | Su | P | Fu |
|-------------------|---|---|----|----|----|---|---|---|---|---|----|----|---|----|
| Peter Peprah Manu | ✓ | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ |   | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓  | ✓  | ✓ | ✓  |

C : Conceptualization

M : Methodology

So : Software

Va : Validation

Fo : Formal analysis

I : Investigation

R : Resources

D : Data Curation

O : Writing - Original Draft

E : Writing - Review & Editing

Vi : Visualization

Su : Supervision

P : Project administration

Fu : Funding acquisition

### Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

### Informed Consent

All participants were informed about the purpose of the study, and their voluntary consent was obtained prior to data collection.

### Ethical Approval

Not Applicable.

### Data Availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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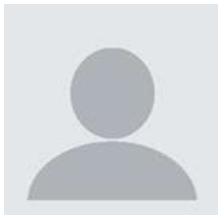
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