

# THE IMPACT OF PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY ON EMPLOYEE MENTAL HEALTH: A PROTOCOL FOR SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

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## ABSTRACT

Employee mental health has emerged as a critical global concern, with data indicating that depression and anxiety contribute to a staggering annual economic loss of 1 trillion dollars due to lost productivity. Psychological safety, defined as a shared belief within a team that the environment is safe for interpersonal risk-taking, is a vital factor influencing employee well-being and organizational performance. This study presents a protocol for a systematic literature review (SLR) designed to explore and synthesize existing evidence regarding the impact of psychological safety on employee mental health. The primary objectives include identifying specific contributing factors of psychological safety, uncovering current research gaps, and raising awareness about the urgency of implementing psychological safety in organizational settings. Adhering to PRISMA-P standards and registered with the PROSPERO network, the review will search three major online databases (PubMed, PsycInfo, and Scopus) for peer-reviewed articles published in English between January 1, 2015, and July 9, 2025. Two independent reviewers will conduct the screening, study selection, and data extraction using Rayyan and Mendeley software, with quality assessments resolved by a third reviewer in case of disagreements. The review encompasses quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods studies focusing on adult working populations (18 years and older) across various professions. Ultimately, the findings will provide actionable insights for organizations to foster supportive work environments, mitigate workplace stress, and enhance overall employee well-being.

**Keywords:** employee mental health, industrial psychology, prisma-p, protocol, psychological safety.

Employee mental health has emerged as a critical concern in the modern global workforce. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2019) reported that common mental disorders, specifically depression and anxiety, lead to a staggering global economic loss of 1 trillion dollars annually due to lost productivity. This issue is not confined to specific regions; in Indonesia, data from the Ministry of Health (2018) indicated a rising prevalence of mental disorders within the productive age population. A significant challenge exacerbating this problem is the pervasive stigma associated with mental health issues, which often deters employees from seeking necessary help. This reluctance can worsen their conditions, subsequently impacting their overall performance and well-being within the workplace.

In this context, the concept of psychological safety has gained prominence as a vital factor influencing employee mental health. Amy Edmondson (1999) defined psychological safety as a shared belief within a team that the environment is safe for interpersonal risk-taking. This concept is further complemented by Kahn (1990), who characterized it as the ability to show and employ oneself without fear of negative consequences to self-image, status, or career. When employees experience psychological safety, they are more inclined to voice their opinions, share innovative ideas, admit mistakes, and seek assistance without

the fear of negative repercussions. This fosters a supportive work environment that can significantly mitigate stress, anxiety, and depression. Previous research has consistently demonstrated a positive correlation between psychological safety and various beneficial organizational outcomes, including increased innovation and improved performance.

Despite the recognized importance of psychological safety and the growing concern over employee mental health, there remains a notable gap in comprehensive systematic literature reviews. While existing reviews may address these concepts in isolation, there is a distinct need for a systematic review that extensively integrates both, particularly within diverse industrial contexts. Such a review would not only delve deeply into how psychological safety influences employee mental health but also identify the specific factors within psychological safety that most significantly contribute to positive mental health outcomes.

Therefore, this study aims to address this research gap by conducting a systematic literature review (SLR) based on established methodological frameworks. The primary objective is to gain a more profound understanding of how psychological safety impacts employee mental health across various settings. The procedure for this review adheres to the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses Protocol (PRISMA-P) and is registered with the PROSPERO network. This research is expected to provide significant theoretical contributions by enriching literature within the field of industrial and organizational psychology, particularly regarding the integration of interpersonal dynamics and employee mental well-being. Practically, this study aims to raise organizational awareness concerning the importance of psychological safety and provide actionable insights for human resource practitioners to design healthier and more supportive work environments.

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## METHODS

This study follows the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) design, adhering to the standards defined by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses Protocol (PRISMA-P). The review’s protocol has been officially registered with the International Prospective Register of Systematic Reviews (PROSPERO) network.

### Participants

This review focuses on employees or adult working populations aged 18 years and older across various occupational settings. All types of employees, including permanent, contractual, managerial, and frontline workers, are eligible for inclusion.

### Eligibility Criteria and Measurement

Peer-reviewed studies focusing on psychosocial exposures relevant to psychological safety and their association with employee mental health outcomes (e.g., stress, burnout, depression, anxiety, or overall well-being) are eligible. The study includes quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods research. Letters to the editor, editorials, conference papers, and articles written in languages other than English are excluded. The essential search keywords for Population, Intervention, Comparison, and Outcomes (PICO) are summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Essential Search for PICO*

P	I	C	O
“Employee” OR “Co-Worker”	No interventions are applicable for this review	No comparators are applicable for this review	“Mental Health” OR “Well-Being” OR “Psychosocial Safety” OR “Psychological Safety”

### Procedure

The systematic search will be conducted across three primary electronic databases: PsycInfo, PubMed, and Scopus. The search is limited to peer-reviewed articles published in the English language between January 1, 2015, and July 9, 2025. To ensure a comprehensive search, the strategy will be reinforced by analyzing the reference lists of included papers and related systematic reviews.

The study selection process involves two independent reviewers who will perform the preliminary screening of titles and abstracts based on the eligibility criteria. Rayyan software will be utilized to facilitate the screening process, while Mendeley software will be used for citation management and the identification of duplicate studies. Any disagreements between reviewers during the selection process will be resolved by a third reviewer. The final study selection will be illustrated using a PRISMA flow diagram.

Risk of bias for the included studies will be assessed independently by one reviewer. Studies will be classified into low, moderate, or high risk of bias based on judgment, with disagreements resolved through consensus or consultation with a third reviewer. Furthermore, if the data is accessible, a subgroup analysis focusing on variables such as race, gender, and job status will be conducted using meta-regression models to assess the influence of participant characteristics.

## DISCUSSION

This protocol serves as a crucial methodological framework to synthesize scientific evidence regarding the relationship between psychological safety and employee mental health. Given the escalating concerns surrounding workplace mental health in the post-pandemic era, this planned systematic review is highly relevant for identifying effective organizational interventions. By adhering to the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis Protocols (PRISMA-P), this protocol ensures a high degree of transparency and replicability throughout the search and study selection process (Moher et al., 2015).

Theoretically, this review aims to explore the interplay between team-level psychological safety (Edmondson, 1999) and the broader Psychosocial Safety Climate (PSC) at the organizational level (Dollard & Bakker, 2010). Integrating these two constructs is expected to address a significant gap in existing literature concerning how top-down policies and immediate team dynamics concurrently influence the psychological well-being of the workforce.

A primary strength of this protocol is its comprehensive search strategy across three major databases PsycInfo, PubMed, and Scopus and the planned use of the Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) Critical Appraisal Tools for quality assessment. This rigorous approach ensures that only high-quality studies are included in the final synthesis, thereby providing a robust foundation for evidence-based Human Resource management policies.

Despite these strengths, several limitations must be acknowledged. Limiting the search to English-language publications may introduce language bias, potentially underrepresenting relevant studies from local contexts, such as those conducted in Indonesia, if they are not published in international journals. Furthermore, the inherent heterogeneity in the operational definitions of mental health across different industrial sectors may pose challenges during the data synthesis stage.

The findings from this systematic review are intended to be disseminated through publication in accredited peer-reviewed journals and presentations at organizational psychology conferences. From a practical standpoint, the results are expected to provide actionable guidance for HR practitioners and organizational leaders in fostering a psychologically safe environment to mitigate employee stress and burnout.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this protocol establishes a rigorous and transparent methodology for conducting a systematic literature review on the impact of psychological safety on employee mental health. By adhering to the PRISMA-P guidelines and utilizing high-quality databases such as PsycInfo, PubMed, and Scopus, this study ensures that the synthesis of evidence will be both comprehensive and replicable. The expected findings will bridge the gap between team-level psychological safety theories and organizational-level psychosocial safety climate frameworks. Ultimately, this systematic review will provide valuable evidence-based insights for practitioners and organizations to prioritize psychological safety as a core strategy for protecting employee mental health and improving overall workplace well-being.

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