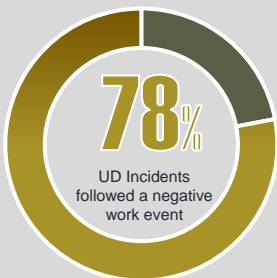




BTAC BULLETIN

EMERGING ISSUES, TRENDS, CAPABILITIES, AND BEST PRACTICES IN INSIDER THREAT ANALYSIS

PSYCHOLOGICAL × RISK FACTORS



The Critical Pathway of Insider Risk¹ (CPIR) outlines predispositions to behaviors of concern and the pathway toward an insider threat incident. Stressors in this model can be positive or negative events that result in changes to personal, social, or professional responsibilities that require people to spend energy and effort to adjust. Most often people adapt to new stressors, sometimes requiring professional support to cope effectively. However, the combination of psychological predispositions, stressors, and poor coping strategies can give rise to a person who progresses on to become an insider risk. For example, personal and financial stressors have been frequently noted as contributing to insider threats, and in 78% of unauthorized disclosure (UD) incidents, individuals experienced at least one negative work-related stressor (e.g. poor performance review, stressful work environment, or interpersonal problems) prior to the UD.

PERSONAL PREDISPOSITION²

Psychological risk factors may increase the risk of violence in a given situation and in response to stressors. However, mental disorders are neither necessary nor sufficient causes of violence³.

Substance misuse or dependence: Can lead to altered/distorted thinking, relationship problems, decreased work performance, irritability, or aggression.

Personality disturbance or disorder: Patterns of paranoia, narcissism, borderline and antisocial tendencies, or significant anger manifestations can cause disruption at home and work.

Severe mental illness: Psychotic disorders, and other psychiatric conditions, can feature psychotic symptoms like delusions and hallucinations, which distort a person's perceptions and may elevate risk for concerning behaviors.

History of suicidality: Suicidal and homicidal violence are more closely linked than many realize. In many cases, homicides are linked with prior suicide attempts, gestures, or suicidal ideation on the part of the perpetrator.

CONCERNING BEHAVIORS

Behaviors of concern arise in multiple life domains. Of particular interest to insider threat is identifiable workplace indicators of the presence of mental health concerns. The early identification and mitigation can provide individuals an offramp to escalating behavior towards a potential insider incident and provide needed resources for an individual. These behaviors can include:

- Changes in work performance or baseline behavior
- Social withdrawal
- Shifts in mood including irritability, sadness, or unusual worry
- Sudden changes in appearance
- Unusual patterns of absenteeism or tardiness
- Communication of threats to self/others
- Paranoia/suspiciousness
- Strong reactions to minor slights or identification with always being a victim

1. Lenzenweger, M. F., & Shaw, E. D. (2022). The Critical Pathway to Insider Risk Model: Brief Overview and Future Directions. *Counter-Insider Threat Research and Practice*, 1(1) 2. Federal Bureau of Investigation, Behavioral Analysis Unit (2017) Making Prevention a Reality: Identifying, assessing, and managing, the threat of targeted attack.

3. Stuart H., Violence and mental illness: an overview. *World Psychiatry*. 2023 JUN;2(2):121-4

ORGANIZATIONAL RESPONSE

After identification of concerning behaviors, an appropriate **organizational response** is paramount to mitigate these risks. For example:

Supporting Treatment: Engagement in treatment for psychiatric conditions helps mitigate risk. This treatment should be vigorously promoted to reduce insider threat risk across organizations.

Training: Incorporate mental health awareness and resilience training to help the workforce recognize the warning signs and learn appropriate strategies and resources for providing support.

Education: Provide education on mental health resources available to servicemembers, contractors, and government civilians.

Engagement: Leadership should encourage and promote open communication and support while promoting work-life balance policies. Commit to consistent engagement with employees struggling with mental health, family stressors, occupational stressors, and/or financial stressors.



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