

Construction worker stigma putting lives at risk, new research warns

Being looked down on isn't just unfair - it's unsafe. New CDU research shows how stigma in construction can put construction workers at risk.

DARWIN , NORTHERN TERRITORY , AUSTRALIA, September 24, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Negative stereotypes about construction workers could be costing lives on building sites, according to new international research led in collaboration with Charles Darwin University (CDU).

The study, published in the [Journal of Construction Engineering and Management](#), found that construction

workers who feel their jobs are devalued or looked down upon by society are significantly less likely to follow safety procedures or participate in safety programs.

Surveying 243 construction workers in China, researchers discovered that perceptions of construction work as "dirty" or "low-status" created a sense of occupational identity threat (a feeling that one's work is devalued or disrespected), undermining pride in professional identity.

This threat, according to researchers, reduced workers' motivation to engage in safe practices and eroded their commitment to workplace safety.

Lead author and Huaibei Normal University Lecturer Zhaobiao Zong said the findings highlight a hidden psychological factor behind workplace safety.

"When workers sense that society undervalues their role, it undermines their identity, erodes pride and self-esteem, and ultimately reduces their willingness to follow safety behaviours," Dr Zong said.



"The construction sector has some of the highest accident rates in the world, including here in Australia," CDU Senior Lecturer in Business Dr Tianyi Long said. Picture: Charles Darwin University (CDU).

The research identifies a powerful protective factor in self-compassion, with workers who practiced self-kindness and mindfulness far less impacted by stigma and more likely to maintain safe behaviours on site.

Dr Zong said the results point to clear strategies for industry leaders and policymakers.

“We need to challenge negative stereotypes about construction work and promote its social value, strengthen workers’ sense of identity through recognition and supportive workplace cultures, and incorporate well-being and resilience training into safety programs,” he said.

“By doing so, we not only protect workers’ mental health but also create safer worksites.”

CDU Senior Lecturer in Business Dr Tianyi Long said the findings have direct implications for Australia.

“The construction sector has some of the highest accident rates in the world, including here in Australia,” Dr Long said.

“This research shows that how workers feel about their jobs, and how they believe others see them, can directly influence safety on site. By building a culture of respect and self-compassion, we can improve wellbeing, reduce accidents and ultimately, save lives.”

The study, [Relationship between Perceived Occupational Stigma](#) and Safety Behavior of Construction Workers: Moderated Mediation Model was published in the Journal of Construction Engineering and Management.

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