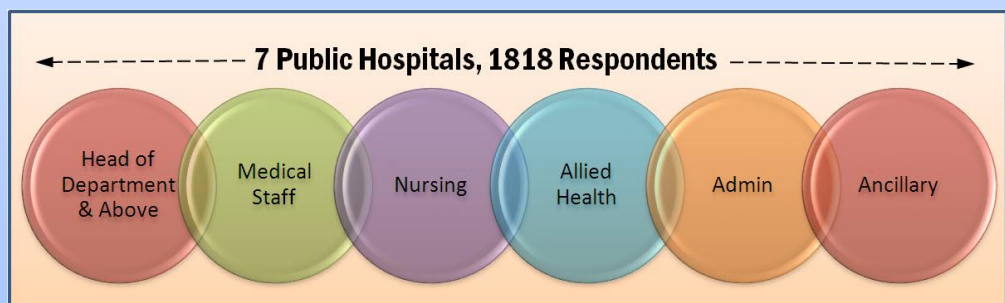


## BACKGROUND

Healthcare workers are exposed to many safety and health hazards. In addition, stress and violence are noted to be high in health sector workplaces. In 2004, a local study reported the prevalence of psychiatric disorder among the doctors and nurses in a medium sized public hospital was similar to those in Britain (28-35%). Interestingly, only a very small percentage (<4%) actually sought help for their emotional problems. To address the effects of acute, chronic and cumulative stress in the healthcare environment in Singapore, the Ministry of Health provided funding to develop a comprehensive crisis response management system (peer support programs/PSPs) that increases mental health awareness, provides emotional support to affected staff during work-related critical incidents and assists hospital management to better understand the emotional needs of the employees. The PSP is a voluntary, system-wide, peer-help, multi-component crisis intervention procedure to assist employee victims of assaults or other acts of violence. Our PSP services include individual and group crisis interventions, consultation on crisis management to senior management, employee victim family interventions, in-house staff counseling services and referrals to mental health professionals as needed. The model of approach is based on the Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM).

## METHOD

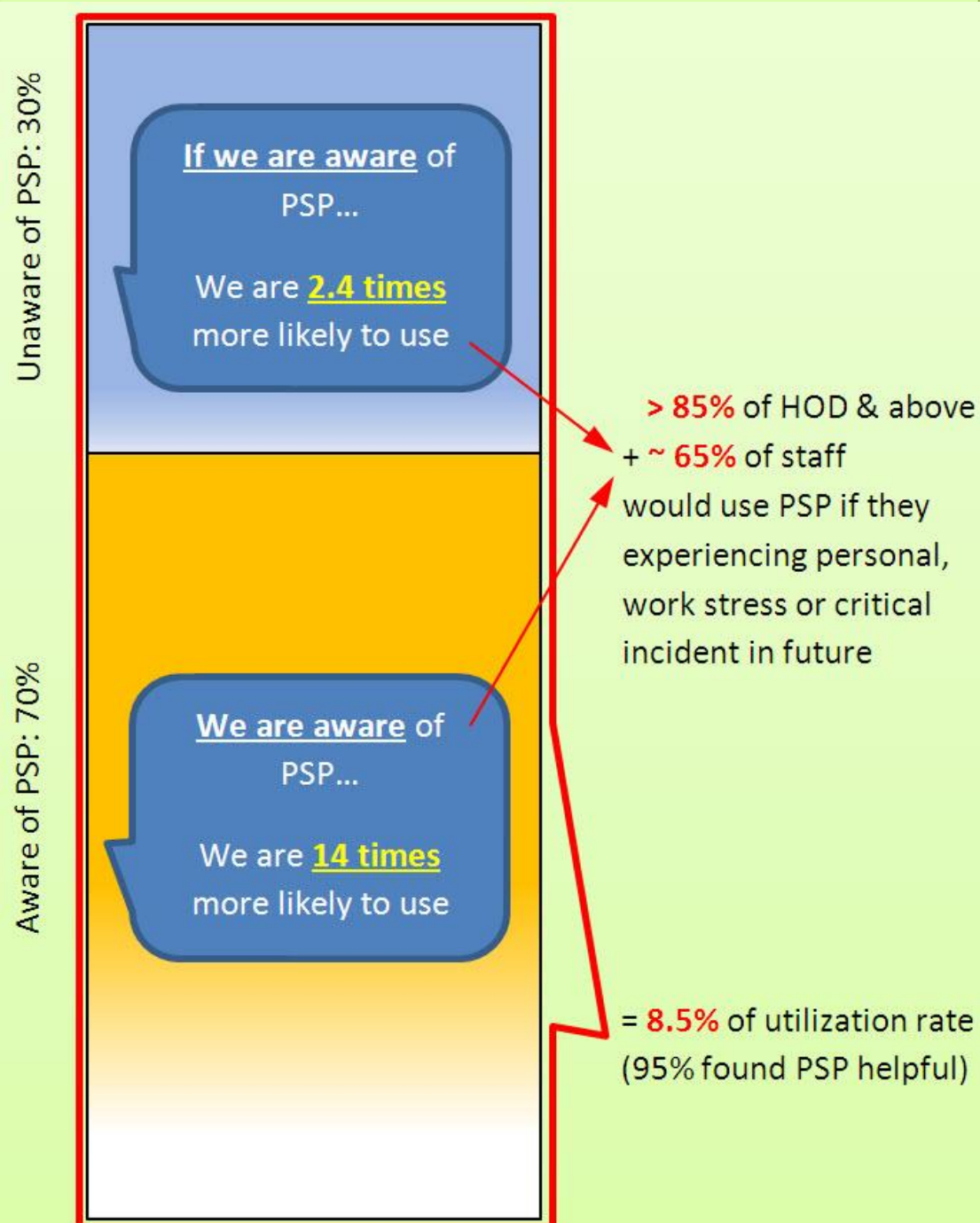
A general survey was conducted over two months across seven public hospitals in Singapore about one year after PSPs were introduced. Healthcare workers from different job categories were asked to indicate their job category (Head of Department & above, Medical, Nursing, Allied Health, Admin, Ancillary, Ward Manager), awareness of PSP in their hospital, if they had utilized the service within the last 12 months, if they had utilized the service was the support helpful to them, and would they use this service if they experienced a critical incident e.g. harassment, abuse, assault, loss, investigation etc. The survey questionnaire was intentionally kept simple to encourage participation. Their participation was strictly anonymous and voluntary.



## RESULTS

A total of 1818 healthcare workers responded to this survey with a proportionate sample of each of the job categories fairly represented. Within one year of set up, about 70% of the staff in the public hospitals were aware of PSP with an average of 8.5% utilization rate.

Those who were aware of the PSP were 14 times more likely to have utilized the services and 95% found the support helpful. The job categories who utilized PSP most were Nursing/Ward Managers (17.6%), HODs & above (16.1%) and Ancillary staff (14.1%) with more than 85% of HODs & above indicating that they would utilize the PSP if they experienced personal or work stress or a critical incident in the future. About 65% of the staff indicated that they would use PSP if they were experiencing personal or work stress or critical incident and they were 2.4 times more likely to do this if they were aware of the service.



## CONCLUSION

The PSPs in the public hospitals achieved the objectives of providing emotional support to affected staff during work-related critical incidents and assisting hospital management to better understand the emotional needs of the employees. Raising awareness of PSP services increases utilization rates. This is important in establishing Peer Support Programs within organizations.

Reference source: International Journal of Emergency Mental Health volume 14:3