

Mental illness in the workplace: recognizing risk

Safeguarding the psychological health and safety of employees has become increasingly important to organizations across the nation. After all, a healthy mind is essential to an individual's well-being, interpersonal relationships, and ability to perform effectively in the workplace and beyond. In addition,



emerging regulations, a growing body of research, and a desire to reduce costs and improve the bottom line are prompting employers to assess their workplaces from a psychological health and safety perspective.

[Psychologically healthy and safe workplaces](#) promote the psychological well-being of employees and actively work to prevent harm to their psychological health due to reckless, negligent or intentional acts.

Workplace risk factors

Great Britain is leading the way in [improving the psychosocial well-being of workers](#) and is recognized internationally for their best practices. Unlike Canada, workplace health and safety in Great Britain is controlled by a single national regulator – the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), which has established numerous management standards designed to reduce work-related stress contributing to ill health.

According to the HSE, the following are the most common stressors:

- Demands – This includes work patterns, workloads, and the work environment.
- Control – Do individuals have any control over how they do their jobs?
- Support – Are employees supported and encouraged by upper management, direct supervisors, or their peers?
- Relationships – How are conflicts and unacceptable behaviours handled in the workplace?
- Role – Do employees understand their roles? Are there conflicting roles?
- Change – How change is communicated and managed can increase or decrease employees' stress.

The following are the [13 psychosocial factors](#) that have been identified to impact psychological response and potentially cause psychological health problems:

- Psychological support
- Organizational culture
- Clear leadership and expectations
- Civility and respect
- Psychological competencies and requirements
- Growth and development
- Recognition and reward
- Involvement and influence
- Workload management
- Engagement
- Balance
- Psychological protection
- Protection of physical safety

When these factors are absent or limited, there is an increased risk to employee psychological health and organizational psychological safety. When these factors are prevalent, resilience and sustainability are more likely.

How companies are mobilizing to recognize and respond to risk

[Canada's Healthy Workplace Month](#), which takes place in October each year, focuses on activities such as risk assessments and action plans designed to minimize risks. For example, managers may seek your input on items such as heavy workloads, conflicting roles, lack of leadership support, fatigue, eldercare or child care problems, financial problems, and other stressors as they seek to identify risk.

As part of its Mental Health Initiative, Bell Canada requires mandatory mental health training of its senior managers. Mental health training can help managers gain a deeper understanding of the mental health issues you may face at some point. It can also improve access to mental information when on the job as well as create a culture of support and understanding.

Another example of mental health awareness at work is the Not Myself Today @ Work campaign which ran from May 9 through to June 6, 2013. This campaign raised funds and awareness for improving mental health in the workplace and brought workplace mental health issues to the forefront. If your employer participated in this campaign, you may have noticed posters, educational resources, stickers, and other materials promoting mental health awareness in your workplace.

Employers throughout Canada are taking a stand against mental health issues and learning to recognize risk. This is good news for employees as you can expect a safer workplace for a more balanced work life.