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Feel at Psychological Risk in Their Workplace, New  
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***Groundbreaking Survey Suggests Canadian Employees  
Under-Report Risk in Their Workplace***

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**Ipsos Reid**

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# **While One in Five (19%) of Canadian Employees Feel at Psychological Risk in Their Workplace, New Tool Suggests that Three in Ten (29%) May Be *Groundbreaking Survey Suggests Canadian Employees Under-Report Risk in Their Workplace***

Toronto, ON – Three in ten (29%) employed Canadians may be experiencing psychologically unsafe and unhealthy workplaces according to a groundbreaking new study produced by Simon Fraser University’s Consortium for Organizational Mental Healthcare (COMH; [www.comh.ca](http://www.comh.ca)), a not-for-profit research centre in the Faculty of Health Sciences at Simon Fraser University. The study was commissioned by the Great-West Life Centre for Mental Health in the Workplace and this survey was conducted by Ipsos Reid.

The survey of some 6,800 Canadian workers suggests that while 19% of Canadian workers may subjectively believe they are in an unhealthy and unsafe psychosocial workplace, the figure rises by 10 full points to 29% when a newly developed set of 12 risk factor assessments is applied.

This is the largest and most significant Canadian research to date that evaluates levels of psychosocial risk faced by employed Canadians at their place of work, with the findings used to help inform the design of a new online resource titled “Guarding Minds @ Work (GM@W): A Workplace Guide to Psychological Safety & Health” ([www.guardingmindsatwork.ca](http://www.guardingmindsatwork.ca)).



The study is part of a new, innovative online tool that will enable workers and their workplaces to self-evaluate along 12 distinct psychosocial risk factors (“PSRs”) in order to assess, understand, and proactively address organizational issues they may be facing. The evaluation is based on sixty (60) questions arrived at through a review of the empirical and legal literature, as well as extensive consultation with a wide range of workplace experts, stakeholders and participants.

### ***Many Workers Under-Report the Conditions of the Workplace...***

An example of the insight yielded by the research is that one in five (19%) Canadian workers reject the subjective premise that “Overall, my current workplace is a psychologically safe and healthy environment to work in”<sup>1</sup> (two thirds – 65% – agree and 16% are neutral on their assessment). However, according to the scoring of the 12 PSRs, there are three in ten (29%) who fall into categories of serious (4%) or significant (25%) concerns in terms of the psychological risks associated with their workplace. And while many of the workers who fall in these categories do in fact recognize that their workplace is not psychologically safe and healthy (nearly half of these, 45%, disagree that their workplace is a psychologically safe and healthy one), more concerning are the proportions who offer neutral or even positive assessments of their workplaces in this regard: among those who fall in the serious or significant concerns categories, three in ten (28%) offer a neutral assessment and one in four (26%) give their workplace a positive rating in terms of its psychological safety and health.

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<sup>1</sup> Respondents were provided with the following definition: A psychologically safe and healthy workplace is one that promotes employees' psychological well-being and does not harm employee mental health in negligent, reckless or intentional ways.



As such, many workers in Canada may, in fact, be working in psychologically risky work environments and not even be aware of it.

Further, the research allows for the comparison of sectors, socio-demographics, regions, company size and numerous other descriptors.

### *Those Most at Risk...*

The findings suggest that those employees who are mainly involved in shift work, who work in a junior level position, are union members, non-management, male, not married, and working for medium or large companies are working in higher psychosocial risk workplaces.

It would also appear that workers who fall into the serious concerns category are significantly more likely to be worried about losing their job and to feel that the recent economic downturn has had a negative impact on their workplace. They are significantly less likely to feel confident about their economic future.

The PSR assessment also indicates that those sectors with employees most at risk are transportation and warehousing, manufacturing, health care and social assistance, and public administration.

The findings of the study are quite consistent across province or region.

*Assessing the workplace based on twelve objective risk factor criteria...*

After an exhaustive consultation process, twelve risk factor areas were established, with five agree/disagree statements per area, for a total of 60 questions. The risk factor areas are: Psychological Support; Organizational Culture; Clear Leadership & Expectations; Civility & Respect; Psychological Job Fit; Growth & Development; Recognition & Reward; Involvement & Influence; Workload Management; Engagement; Balance; and Psychological Protection.

Each of the 12 PSRs addressed in the study was evaluated using a scoring system that measured levels of agreement with the five statements related to that particular risk factor. Scores were divided into four distinct risk-level categories corresponding with serious concerns, significant concerns, moderate concerns, and minimal concerns. While the aggregate “at risk” group of Canadian workers is 29%, the table below shows the proportions of Canadian workers at *each* risk factor level within each PSR.

Risk Factor Area	Serious Concerns	Significant Concerns	Moderate Concerns	Minimal Concerns
PSR1: Psychological Support	7%	27%	37%	29%
PSR2: Organizational Culture	8%	29%	37%	26%
PSR3: Clear Leadership & Expectations	7%	26%	35%	31%



PSR4: Civility & Respect	6%	25%	37%	31%
PSR5: Psychological Job Fit	4%	22%	40%	34%
PSR6: Growth & Development	8%	25%	35%	33%
PSR7: Recognition & Reward	7%	25%	34%	34%
PSR8: Involvement & Influence	5%	19%	35%	41%
PSR9: Workload Management	4%	25%	38%	33%
PSR10: Engagement	2%	9%	30%	59%
PSR11: Balance	7%	27%	34%	32%
PSR12: Psychological Protection	9%	24%	34%	33%

### *Findings by Sector...*

The findings indicate that those sectors with employees more at risk are transportation and warehousing, and manufacturing. Conversely, those sectors exhibiting the lowest levels of risk are professional, scientific and technical services; real estate, rental and leasing; and finance and insurance.

The following table ranks the sectors by risk:



Sector	Serious Concerns	Significant Concerns	Total % Reporting Risk
Transportation and warehousing	5%	35%	40%
Manufacturing	5%	33%	38%
Administrative and support/waste management and remediation services	5%	27%	32%
Public administration	3%	29%	32%
Health care and social assistance	4%	28%	32%
Arts, entertainment and recreation	2%	28%	30%
Mining and oil and gas extraction	2%	27%	29%
Wholesale trade	4%	24%	28%
Retail trade	4%	24%	28%
Information and cultural industries	3%	23%	26%
Other services (except public administration)	2%	24%	26%
Utilities	3%	22%	25%



Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting	3%	22%	25%
Educational services	2%	23%	25%
Construction	5%	19%	24%
Finance and insurance	2%	22%	24%
Real estate, rental and leasing	4%	19%	23%
Professional, scientific and technical services	2%	18%	20%

***Socio-demographic and other Key Descriptors...***

The findings suggest that those employees who are mainly involved in shift work, who work in a junior level position, are union members, non-management, male, working more than 50 hours per week, not married, and working for medium or large companies report working in higher risk workplaces as far as psychological health and safety are concerned.

The following table ranks various socio-demographic and other key descriptors by risk:

Descriptor	Serious Concerns	Significant Concerns	Total % Reporting Risk
Shift work	7%	34%	41%
Junior level position	5%	34%	39%
Union member	5%	33%	38%



Non-management	4%	28%	32%
Male	5%	26%	31%
Earning less than \$30,000 per year	5%	26%	31%
Earning between \$30,000 and \$60,000 per year	4%	27%	31%
Some post secondary education	4%	27%	31%
Marital status: single	5%	25%	30%
Marital status: separated/divorced/widowed	5%	25%	30%
Age: 35 to 54	4%	26%	30%
30-49 hours worked per week	4%	26%	30%
50+ hours worked per week	4%	25%	29%
Private sector	4%	25%	29%
For-profit	4%	25%	29%
Permanent worker	4%	25%	29%
Age: 55+	4%	25%	29%
Full-time	4%	25%	29%
Urban	4%	25%	29%
Rural	3%	26%	29%



Public sector	3%	26%	29%
Mid-level position	3%	25%	28%
University education	3%	25%	28%
Married/living common-law	3%	25%	28%
Not-for-profit	3%	25%	28%
100-499 employees	3%	25%	28%
Female	3%	24%	27%
Earning \$60,000-\$100,000 per year	3%	24%	27%
Seasonal worker	2%	25%	27%
High school or less education	4%	22%	26%
Part-time	3%	23%	26%
Age: 18-34	3%	23%	26%
Earning \$100,000 + per year	4%	21%	25%
Non-union	3%	22%	25%
0-99 employees	3%	21%	24%
Less than 30 hours worked per week	3%	20%	23%
Managing others	3%	20%	23%
Contract	2%	19%	21%
Senior level	2%	17%	19%



Self-employed	1%	11%	12%
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It would also appear that workers who fall into the serious concerns category are significantly more likely to be worried about losing their job and to feel that the recent economic downturn has had a negative impact on their workplace. They are significantly less likely to feel confident about their economic future.

Strongly/Somewhat agree Summary Table:

		PSR			
		OVERALL PSR SCORE			
	TOTAL	Serious concerns	Significant concerns	Moderate concerns	Minimal concerns
		A	B	C	D
Base: All Respondents					
Unweighted Base	6807	249	1728	2682	2148
Weighted Base	6807	251	1720	2704	2132
1) I am worried about losing my job	1783 26%	124 49%	576 33%	702 26%	382 18%
2) The recent economic downturn has had a very negative impact on my workplace	3179 47%	153 61%	941 55%	1259 47%	825 39%
3) I expect my personal financial or economic situation to be at least the same or better one year from now, compared to what it is like today	4950 73%	131 52%	1074 62%	2026 75%	1720 81%



*Province/Region...*

Province/Region	Serious Concerns	Significant Concerns	Total % Reporting Risk
Ontario	4%	26%	30%
Québec	3%	27%	30%
PEI/Newfoundland and Labrador	5%	24%	29%
Saskatchewan	4%	25%	29%
British Columbia	4%	24%	28%
Alberta	4%	23%	27%
Manitoba	3%	22%	25%
Nova Scotia	1%	24%	25%
New Brunswick	2%	22%	24%
NWT/Yukon/Nunavut	0	20%	20%

*These are some of the findings of a poll conducted on behalf of the Consortium for Organizational Mental Healthcare (COMH) from March 19 to April 7, 2009. This online survey of 6,807 employed Canadian adults was conducted via the Ipsos I-Say Online Panel, Ipsos Reid's national online panel. The results of this poll are based on a sample where quota sampling and weighting were employed to balance demographics and ensure that the sample's composition reflects that of the actual employed Canadian population according to Census data. Quota samples with weighting from the Ipsos online panel provide results that are intended to approximate a probability sample. Statistical margins of error are not applicable to online polls, however an unweighted probability sample of this size, with a*



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100% response rate, would have an estimated margin of error of +/- 1.2 percentage points, 19 times out of 20, had the entire population of employed adults in Canada been polled.

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*For full tabular results, please visit our website at [www.ipsos.ca](http://www.ipsos.ca). News Releases are available at: <http://www.ipsos-na.com/news/>*

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