

New resource offers Canadian employers tools to address mental health issues



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The Great-West Life Centre for Mental Health in the Workplace (the Centre) has launched Guarding Minds @ Work - an evidence-based tool developed by leading Canadian mental health researchers. This new tool provides Canadian employers with comprehensive ways to assess the psychological safety and health of their specific workplace, as well as information on appropriate solutions and a method of measuring the effectiveness of those solutions.

The tool was launched in support of [new research conducted by Ipsos Reid](#) for the Consortium for Organizational Mental Healthcare (COMH) (a leading national research centre in the Faculty of Health Sciences at Simon Fraser University, B.C.) which revealed that 3 in 10 Canadian employees may be experiencing a work environment that is not psychologically safe and healthy.

The research carried out from March 19 to April 7, 2009 surveyed 6,800 employed Canadians and evaluated risk levels of psychological safety and health in the workplace, by sector.

Findings of the survey revealed that one in five (19 per cent) Canadian employees feel their work environment is not psychologically safe or mentally healthy. Employees most at risk are middle-aged, male and work more than 50 hours per, week for medium-sized or larger companies. Those at risk also included individuals holding more junior level positions and a high school education level or less, involved in shift work and union members,

The industries with employees most at risk include transportation and warehousing, manufacturing, health care and social services, and public administration.

"Mental health issues pose a direct impact to the bottom line of Canadian businesses," said Mike Schwartz, Executive Director of the Centre and Senior Vice-President, Group Benefits at Great-West Life. "Most employers have access to materials and resources on physical safety and health issues, but there are very few resources for employers to assess the psychological safety and health of their own workplace."

Guarding Minds @ Work offers employers user-friendly tools to help assess their organization's psychological safety and health, and recommends pro-active action steps that include:

- An explanation of the concept of psychological safety and health
- The business and some legal and health considerations on why mental health in the workplace is important
- Practical, user-friendly assessment tools, including an organizational audit and an online survey to measure psychological safety and health in the workplace through 12 risk factors such as levels of psychological support and protection, workload management, work-life balance and more
- A risk "Report Card" with actions to help reduce psychological risks in the workplace
- Evaluation tools to measure progress and outcomes

"Mental health is gaining recognition as an integral part of workplace safety and health, partially as a result of the accommodation laws established under human rights legislation and evolving employment standards legislation," Dr. Martin Shain, Adjunct Professor with COMH. "The duty to provide a psychologically safe workplace is emerging as an ethical and legal obligation for Canadian employers."