The results of this survey provide employers with an opportunity to address and take steps to protect their employees’ mental health. But to do this, employers face a number of fundamental questions:

• Do we have a problem?
• What factors are causing the problem? Where should we focus?
• What actions might help?
• How do we assess the results? Guards™ Work can help small and large employers answer these questions. It is freely available at www.guardingmindsatwork.ca and www.workplacesтратegiesformentalhealth.com.

Workplace Strategies for Mental Health is a unique website dedicated to helping all Canadian employers who wish to address mental health issues in the workplace. This website is one of the initiatives of the Great-West Life Centre for Mental Health in the Workplace, a freely available public resource providing strategies, tools and support for research and initiatives aimed at improving workplace mental health for all Canadians. One such tool is Managing Mental Health Matters™, a series of training videos for managers and others working with employees who may have mental health issues. Subjects covered include accommodation, return to work planning, performance management and co-worker conflict.

Survey
The national survey used a questionnaire called the PSR-12 Employee Survey that measures employees’ perceptions of psychological risks in their workplaces. The PSR-12 survey measures a group of psychological risk factors derived from existing scientific evidence and refined on the basis of extensive consultation with Canadian employees, employers and union representatives, as well as national and international experts and researchers.

PSR-12 risk factors

PSR1: Psychological Support: A work environment where employees feel valued, respected, and included. 

PSR2: Organizational Culture: A work environment characterized by trust, honesty, and fairness.

PSR3: Clear Leadership & Expectations: A work environment where there is effective leadership and support that helps employees know what they need to do, how their work contributes to the organization, and whether there are impending changes.

PSR4: Civility & Respect: A work environment where employees are respectful and considerate in their interactions with one another, as well as with customers, clients and the public.

PSR5: Psychological Job Fit: A work environment where there is a good fit between employees’ interpersonal and emotional competencies, their job skills, and the position they hold.

PSR6: Growth & Development: A work environment where employees receive encouragement and support in the development of their interpersonal, emotional and job skills.

PSR7: Recognition & Reward: A work environment where there is appropriate acknowledgment and appreciation of employees’ efforts in a fair and timely manner.

PSR8: Involvement & Influence: A work environment where employees are included in discussions about how their work is done, and how important decisions are made.

PSR9: Workload Management: A work environment where tasks and responsibilities can be accomplished successfully within the time available.

PSR10: Engagement: A work environment where employees enjoy and feel connected to their work, and where they feel motivated to do their job well.

PSR11: Balance: A work environment where there is recognition of the need for balance between the demands of work, family and personal life.

PSR12: Psychological Protection: A work environment where employees’ psychological safety is ensured.

For further information
• Great-West Life Centre for Mental Health in the Workplace (www.workplacesтратegiesformentalhealth.com)
• Consortium for Organizational Mental Healthcare (CMH; www.cmhc.ca)
• Guarding Minds @ Work: A Workplace Guide to Psychological Safety and Health (www.guardingmindsatwork.ca)

Results of the survey were used by the OMWB researchers to establish baseline data for Guarding Minds @ Work: A Workplace Guide to Psychological Safety and Health. This free set of online tools is available to employers of any size to help them assess the level of risk in the workplace, identify specific actions that they can take and evaluate the effectiveness of their efforts.

June 2008: Guarding Minds @ Work commissioned by Great-West Life Centre for Mental Health in the Workplace

March 2009: Ipsos Reid National survey on psychosocial risks commissioned by OMWB project team

A survey of 6,804 working Canadians, weighted (gender, region, industry sector and business size) to reflect the population of working Canadians according to Statistics Canada data.

The Ipsos Reid survey on psychological safety and health in the workplace:

The Ipsos Reid survey on psychological safety and health in the workplace: a Call to Action!

Background
In 2009, Ipsos Reid was commissioned by the Guarding Minds @ Work research team at Simon Fraser University to conduct the largest public opinion survey to date looking at psychosocial risks in Canadian workplaces. These risks are features of the workplace environment that impact workers’ psychological safety and health. Employers, employees and unions are accustomed to thinking about physical safety and health in the workplace, and now, psychological safety and health is gaining increasing attention.

“Guarding Minds @ Work™ is an innovative, web-based program which employers can use to assess and address psychosocial risk levels in their workplace. Development of Guarding Minds @ Work was commissioned by the Great-West Life Centre for Mental Health in the Workplace, and funded by The Great-West Life Assurance Company. Guarding Minds @ Work is available to all employers free from the Great-West Life Centre website at www.workplacesтратegiesformentalhealth.com or at www.guardingmindsatwork.ca

Survey results: three in ten at risk

While many employees reported a moderate level of overall risk, there were areas of concern. According to the risk factors measured by the survey, about three in ten employed Canadians (29%) fall into the categories of serious or significant concerns. While Canadian employers have a number of strengths, the survey also suggests that psychological risk levels are high and that employers have opportunities to do better in protecting their employees’ psychological safety and health. It should be noted, however, that the drivers of risk are complex and there are a number of factors that go into evaluation.

One observation is that the survey provides a deeper view of risk factors than has typically been surveyed, since it covered 12 evidence-based psychosocial risk factors (PSRs) assessed within Guarding Minds @ Work. While issues like workload and balance have received much publicity, the survey also revealed concerns in other areas which have not received as much attention. This implies that assessing workplace psychological health and safety is complex and multiple factors must be considered during evaluation. An instrument such as Guarding Minds @ Work can help employers understand more clearly their particular risk drivers and where to focus attention.

Income and workplace hierarchies
Survey results indicate that employee incomes and standing within workplace hierarchies contribute to the manifestation of serious or significant concerns.

The level of control that employees have in the workplace seems to play a big role in psychosocial risk. Those with lower levels of control are at risk.

Degrees of concern appear to correlate inversely with levels of seniority, with junior-level employees being the most likely, and senior-level employees being the least likely, to fall into the categories of serious or significant concerns.

Across nearly all PSRs, managers are less likely than non-managers to fall into the categories of serious or significant concerns. For all PSRs, union members are more likely than non-union members to fall into the categories of serious or significant concerns. Across most PSRs, those with lower incomes are more likely than those with higher incomes to fall into the categories of serious or significant concerns.

The Great-West Life Centre for Mental Health in the Workplace (www.workplacesтратegiesformentalhealth.com) is a partnership between the Great-West Life Assurance Company, the Canadian Mental Health Association and the Ipsos Reid Survey Research Unit. The Great-West Life Centre for Mental Health in the Workplace is funded by The Great-West Life Assurance Company. The Ipsos Reid survey on psychological safety and health in the workplace: a Call to Action!

For further information
• PSR10 Engagement – employees generally feel quite connected to their workplace, their jobs, and are motivated to do better
• PSR11 Influence – employees mostly felt included in important decisions regarding their own job or other aspects of their organization

POSITIVE RESULTS

• PSR10 Engagement – employees generally feel quite connected to their workplace, their jobs, and are motivated to do better
• PSR11 Influence – employees mostly felt included in important decisions regarding their own job or other aspects of their organization

LEAST POSITIVE RESULTS

• PSR2 Organizational Culture – a moderately to high level of concern was expressed about the level of trust, accountability, respect and fairness in Canadian workplaces
• PSR10 Engagement
• PSR11 Influence

The Ipsos Reid survey on psychological safety and health in the workplace: a Call to Action!

The Ipsos Reid survey on psychological safety and health in the workplace: a Call to Action!
Shift workers are more likely than any other workers to fall into the categories of serious or significant concerns. Yet, results show that the type of work performed is a greater factor in increasing psychosocial risk than the number of hours worked. Shift workers are more likely than any other workers to fall into the categories of serious or significant concerns.

The survey also included a set of questions that screened for depressed mood and anxiety problems. This does not necessarily mean that those endorsing these questions are clinically depressed (that has to be assessed and diagnosed by a qualified healthcare provider) but the questions do provide indicators of psychological health problems that impact the workplace.

Connections between risk factors, depression, and anxiety

These results are consistent with the idea that certain kinds of workplace risks contribute to depression in workers. It should be acknowledged that simply being depressed might cause someone to perceive their workplace in a more generally negative way (instead of concluding that greater levels of workplace risk lead to increased depression). But the fact that only a few specific factors were related to depression tends to support the idea that particular aspects of workplaces raise the risk of depression.

So what can an employer do?

There are a number of findings in the Ipsos Reid survey that merit further discussion, however, the main value of the survey is to demonstrate that the key organizational psychosocial risk factors can be measured and the resulting cost impacts on employers from lost productivity, absenteeism, disability and increased health costs. If even moderate risk levels represent an opportunity to reduce cost and improve performance, then the survey suggests that increasing focus and support for employee psychological health and safety represents a significant need, obligation and opportunity for employers. Increasingly, employers face regulatory obligations to maintain workplaces which are safe, not only physically but psychologically. The survey showed areas where a significant proportion of the workers surveyed expressed significant or serious concerns, as well as risks related to depression and anxiety for certain employees.

Connections between risk factors and job performance

It has been shown that workers under high degrees of stress or suffering from common mental health problems are likely to demonstrate presenteeism. Those workers show up for work but underperform, likely due to difficulties with concentration, sustained effort, decision-making, interpersonal involvement and/or organization.

There is a relationship between the PSR12 (Psychological Protection) scores and presenteeism. Across demographics, presenteeism is indicated by a lower level of Engagement (PSR10), that is, they do not feel as connected to the job and the workplace, as well as a lower level of Balance (PSR11) between work and personal life.
Ipsos Reid PSR - 12 Score Chart

Personal attributes

Important gender differences were demonstrated by the survey. Across all PSRs, men are more likely than women to fall into the categories of serious or significant concerns. Age also plays a major role in perceptions of psychosocial risk. For nearly all PSRs, those aged 35 or older are more likely than those aged 18-34 to fall into the categories of serious or significant concerns.

Work hours and industry sectors

The survey showed that employees who work full-time are more likely than part-time employees or self-employed individuals to fall into the categories of serious or significant concerns. Yet, results show that the type of work performed is a greater factor in increasing psychosocial risk than the number of hours worked. Shift workers are more likely than any other workers to fall into the categories of serious or significant concerns.

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So what can an employer do?

There are a number of findings in the Ipsos Reid survey that merit further discussion, however, the main value of the survey is to demonstrate that key organizational psychosocial risk factors can be measured, and that these factors are linked to performance and mental health problems in the workplace.

Generally speaking, there is extensive research supporting the links between employee psychological health and safety and performance, and the resulting cost impacts on employers from lost productivity, presenteeism, disability and increased health costs. If even moderate risk levels represent an opportunity to reduce cost and improve performance, then the survey suggests that increasing focus and support for employee psychological health and safety represents a significant need, obligation and opportunity for employers. Increasingly, employers face regulatory obligations to maintain workplaces which are safe, not only physically but psychologically. The survey showed areas where a significant proportion of the workers surveyed expressed significant or serious concerns, as well as risks related to depression and anxiety for certain employees.
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The Ipsos Reid survey was commissioned by the Guarding Minds @ Work project team. Great-West Life is a member of the Consortium for Organizational Mental Healthcare (and its predecessors). The Great-West Life Assurance Company, Great-West Life and the Great-West Life Assurance Company logo are trademarks of The Great-West Life Assurance Company. Great-West Life is a member of the Great-West Life Assurance Company. The Great-West Life Assurance Company logo is a registered trademark of The Great-West Life Assurance Company. For further information on Canadian employers, employers and unions are accustomed to thinking about physical safety and health in the workplace – and now, psychological safety and health is getting increasing attention.

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Across nearly all PSRs, managers are less likely than non-managers to fall into the categories of serious or significant concerns.

For all PSRs, union members are more likely than non-union members to fall into the categories of serious or significant concerns.

Across most PSRs, those with lower incomes are more likely than those with higher incomes to fall into the categories of serious or significant concerns.