

Mental Health

Mental Health - Introduction

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What is mental health?

Mental health is a state of well-being in which a person understands his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community.

Both physical and mental health are the result of a complex interplay between many individual and environmental factors, including:

- family history of illness and disease/genetics
- lifestyle and health behaviours (e.g., smoking, exercise, substance use)
- levels of personal and workplace stress
- exposure to toxins
- exposure to trauma
- personal life circumstances and history
- access to supports (e.g., timely healthcare, social supports)
- coping skills

When the demands placed on someone exceed their resources and coping abilities, their mental health will be negatively affected. Two examples of common demands are: i) working long hours under difficult circumstances, and ii) caring for a chronically ill relative or friend.

Economic hardship, unemployment, underemployment and poverty also have the potential to harm mental health.

What is mental illness?

Mental illness is a recognized, medically diagnosable illness that results in the significant impairment of an individual's cognitive, affective (emotional) or relational abilities. Mental disorders result from biological, developmental and/or psychosocial factors and can be managed using approaches comparable to those applied to physical disease (i.e., prevention, diagnosis, treatment, and rehabilitation).

What is psychological safety and health?

The Canadian Oxford Dictionary defines psychological as “of, relating to, affecting, or arising in the mind”. The concept of “psychological safety” involves preventing injury to the mental well-being of workers. A psychologically safe and healthy workplace is one that promotes workers' mental well-being and does not harm employee mental health through negligent, reckless or intentional ways. For example, a psychologically safe workplace would be free of excessive fear or chronic anxiety.

What is the difference between a mentally healthy workplace and a psychologically healthy workplace?

Nothing - psychologically healthy workplaces and mentally healthy workplaces both describe the same high-functioning, respectful and productive workplace. The term “psychologically healthy workplace” is often used when talking about preventing psychological injuries (e.g., stress-related emotional conditions resulting from real or imagined threats or injuries). The term “mentally healthy workplace” is often used within the context of mental health promotion and is viewed as a strategy used to reduce risk factors for developing mental illness.

How do psychosocial risk factors in the workplace affect employee health?

Workplace health and safety has traditionally focused on addressing hazards that could cause physical harm, such as injuries to the body (e.g., cuts, bruises, broken bones, etc.). To have a complete or comprehensive approach, workplaces should also give the same priority and attention to psychological hazards.

There is strong evidence that workplace management practices, communication systems, and participation systems can influence employee's mental health, in both positive and negative ways. The term “psychosocial factors” is often used to describe these practices and systems.

- Positive influences can make you feel energized, positively challenged, motivated, and engaged.
- Negative influences can make you feel frustrated, burnt-out, unmotivated, and disengaged.

See the OSH Answers [Mental Health - Psychosocial Risk Factors in the Workplace](#) for more information.

Where can I find more information?

[Mental Health Commission of Canada](#)

Funded by Health Canada, the Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC) has been developing programs and tools to support the mental health and wellness of Canadians since 2007. The MHCC offers resources on psychological health and safety topics including action guides, videos introducing the psychosocial factors, and case studies.

[Guarding Minds at Work \(GM@W\)](#)

A set of free tools (surveys, automated scorecards, audit forms, evidence-based recommendations and evaluation methods) that can be used to assess and address the psychosocial risk factors (PSRs) in your workplace.

[CSA Standard “Z1003-13 - Psychological health and safety in the workplace - Prevention, promotion, and guidance to staged implementation”](#)

CAN/CSA-Z1003-13 (BNQ 9700-803/2013) is a voluntary standard intended to provide systematic guidelines for Canadian employers that will help enable them to develop and continuously improve psychologically safe and healthy work environments for their employees. The standard is currently available for free from the CSA website.

[Canadian Mental Health Association](#)

The Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) is a non-profit organization that has been providing services to persons with mental health issues since 1918. The CMHA offers information on understanding your mental health and information on mental illness

[Government of Canada: Mental Health and Wellness](#)

Information from the Government of Canada about mental illness, its risk factors, symptoms, treatment and suicide prevention.

(*We have mentioned these organizations as a means of providing a potentially useful referral. You should contact the organization(s) directly for more information about their services. Please note that mention of these organizations does not represent a recommendation or endorsement by CCOHS of these organizations over others of which you may be aware.)

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