

What is Psychological Health in the Workplace?

Georgina George, MScOT Student, University of Alberta

Psychological Health and Safety in the Occupational Therapy Workplace

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Everyone talks about stress, but not all stress is bad. Sometimes, coming from a good source, stress can act as a motivator and driver towards success. On the other hand, negative stress that is prolonged can have serious consequences on the body. Stress can be defined as the way in which our bodies handle or cope with the demands placed on it. Usually, the body can cope with physical stress. However, given today's lifestyle we are exposed to another type of stress called psychological stress which if not treated can have serious and long lasting negative effects. Most of all, psychological health and safety problems have a powerful and expanding impact in the workplace. This is often manifested in **workplace conflict, high employee turnover, reduced performance, low job satisfaction, loss of productivity** or disability claims based on **stress** or **depression**. Because of its subtler and less overt nature, psychological and mental illness can go unnoticed or is ignored. With a physical injury, there are often signs or physical components that can be detected. However, there is no way to medically scan or detect a psychological illness. People are often less tolerant or accepting and people with mental health problems are at risk of being stigmatized. At times because of the stigma associated with psychological injury in the workplace, many workers choose to remain silent.

A study conducted by Moll (2014) examined several aspects of healthcare workers' silence around mental health issues in the workplace and noted that it is difficult to detect the simple changes as a result of psychological health problems since these may often be confused with the individual's personality. Despite the high rate of stress and mental illness among many health care workers, many continue to work although they have symptoms that affect their performance. They worry about asking for help because of the stigma, and they worry that their co-workers may see them as incapable and inefficient. They also worry about losing their jobs. Like other health professionals, occupational therapists are not immune to psychological risk in the workplace. A 2012 survey conducted by Great-West Life's Centre for Mental Health in the workplace, showed that more than 70% of Canadian employees surveyed indicated some concern with psychological health and safety in their workplace. Over 50% reported experiencing frustration, exhaustion, or irritation sometimes or often in the previous month while about a quarter reported experiencing anxiety, helplessness, or depression. Ashby et al. (2013) examined the factors that influence the resilience of occupational health therapists in mental health practice and found that there is a strong connection between maintaining professional resilience through professional self-care and occupation based practice.

The accompanying video will further explore psychological health, the factors which impact a workers' response to work and work condition and explore the Canadian initiatives undertaken to address psychological health and well being in the workplace.

RESOURCES

The Canadian Standards Association (CSA group)

Guarding Minds@Work document and Resources

Mental Health Commission of Canada: PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALTH & SAFETY (AN ACTION GUIDE FOR EMPLOYERS)

REFERENCES

Ashby, S. E., et al. (2013). Factors that influence the professional resilience of occupational therapists in mental health practice. *Australian Occupational Therapy Journal*, 60(2), 110-119. doi:10.1111/1440-1630.12012

Moll, Sandra E. (2014). The web of silence: A qualitative case study of early intervention and support for healthcare workers with mental ill-health. *BMC Public Health* 2014, 14:138. doi:10.1186/1471-2458-14-138