# Psychosocial Factors

## What are Psychosocial Factors?

Psychosocial factors are elements that impact employees' psychological responses to work and work conditions, potentially causing psychological health problems. Psychosocial factors include the way work is carried out (deadlines, workload, work methods) and the context in which work occurs (including relationships and interactions with managers and supervisors, colleagues and coworkers, and clients or customers).

## What is the relationship between Psychosocial Factors and psychological health?

Considerable evidence indicates that psychosocial factors may increase stress, which may then lead to mental distress. Does this mean that work "causes" mental disorders? In the majority of cases, no. The fact is that we simply do not know the specific cause of most mental disorders for particular individuals. We do know, however, that employees in workplaces with high psychosocial risk are more likely to have mental disorders. In addition, workplaces that do not attend to psychosocial risks are likely to make existing employee conditions worse and impede efforts toward effective treatment and rehabilitation. Furthermore, recently Canadian courts have rendered legal decisions that appear to attribute the cause of some types of mental disorder to the acts or omissions of the employer.

A supportive work environment reduces the onset, severity, impact and duration of mental disorders. Furthermore, organizations that make the effort to address psychosocial risks and create a psychologically healthy workplace will have healthier, happier employees, and are likely to reap benefits in productivity, sustainability and growth.

## How were the 13 Psychosocial Factors in Guarding Minds at Work determined?

The 13 Psychosocial Factors were determined via a Grounded Theory approach, which involved a thorough review of relevant literature and extensive consultation with Canadian employers, unions and employees. This included the following steps:

- Review of the scientific literature pertaining to workplace mental health.
- Review of relevant Canadian regulatory and case law pertaining to the workplace and psychological safety.
- Formation of an advisory committee which provided input on each step of the development of GM@W. The committee consisted of representatives from the mental health, scientific, union, occupational health and employer communities.
- Consultation with experts in workplace mental health from countries and jurisdictions with well-developed workplace psychosocial risk assessment resources.
- Implementation of focus groups across Canada with key stakeholders — legal professionals, union representatives, small and large employers, employees and researchers — to provide input into the description and relevance of the Psychosocial Factors.
- Implementation of a national survey amongst a diverse array of informants to gain input into the description and sample questions for each of the 13 Psychosocial Factors.

The 13 Psychosocial Factors are consistent with domains identified by a large body of research as areas of fundamental psychosocial risk; the definitions and language used here are unique to Guarding Minds at Work. For each of the factors, lower scores indicate greater risk to employee psychological health and organizational psychological safety; higher scores indicate greater employee and organizational resilience and sustainability. The factors are interrelated and therefore influence one another; positive or negative changes in one factor are likely to change other factors in a similar manner. The 13 Psychosocial Factors are relevant to Canadian organizations and employees, whether those organizations are large or small, in the public or private sector.

## What Psychosocial Factors does Guarding Minds at Work address?

There are 13 Psychosocial Factors assessed by Guarding Minds at Work:

### PF1: Psychological Support
A work environment where coworkers and supervisors are supportive of employees' psychological and mental health concerns, and respond appropriately as needed.

### PF2: Organizational Culture
A work environment characterized by trust, honesty and fairness.

### PF3: 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.

### PF4: 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.

### PF5: Psychological Competencies & Requirements
A work environment where there is a good fit between employees' interpersonal and emotional competencies and the requirements of the position they hold.

### PF6: Growth & Development
A work environment where employees receive encouragement and support in the development of their interpersonal, emotional and job skills.

### PF7: Recognition & Reward
A work environment where there is appropriate acknowledgement and appreciation of employees' efforts in a fair and timely manner.

### PF8: Involvement & Influence
A work environment where employees are included in discussions about how their work is done and how important decisions are made.

### PF9: Workload Management

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

### PF10: Engagement

A work environment where employees feel connected to their work and are motivated to do their job well.

### PF11: Balance

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

### PF12: Psychological Protection

A work environment where employees' psychological safety is ensured.

### PF13: Protection of Physical Safety

A work environment where management takes appropriate action to protect the physical safety of employees.