



Action on Workplace Stress:

**Mental Injury Prevention Tools
for Ontario Workers**

**Online resources for the assessment
and control of workplace psychosocial
hazards**



Action on Workplace Stress

A Worker's Guide to Addressing Workplace Causes of Mental Distress

This guide and resource kit will provide workers a basic understanding and a place to start to learn about workplace stress and what to do about it. The guide gives definitions, common causes of mental distress, legal frameworks (focusing on Ontario), possible actions to take, and resources available. It is an introduction and action guide created by workers for workers.

These tools are not clinical diagnostic tools. They are not meant to diagnose medical or psychological conditions or to be used by a physician to these ends. These tools are designed to identify problems that may exist within the workplace and provide possible avenues to address them.

This resource kit and tools are provided with a focus on the Ontario jurisdiction – workers in other provinces or in federally regulated workplaces should refer to their own legal framework.

Online resources for the assessment and control of workplace psychosocial hazards

Copenhagen Psychosocial Questionnaire (COPSOQ):

The Copenhagen Psychosocial Questionnaire (COPSOQ) (Kristensen et al., 2005) is a questionnaire constructed in an attempt to cover as many of the workplace general and psychosocial risk factors as possible. Many other surveys are constrained to a specific theory of workplace stress (e.g. the demand-control model, or, the effort-reward model, or, the workplace justice model, etc.), whereas the COPSOQ survey attempts to include all these dimensions in a single tool (23 dimensions in the short version). It has 3 versions (short, medium, and long) depending on the level of use (screening/education tool, workplace evaluation tool, and research tool, respectively). The MIT group is using a hybrid of the 3 versions as its tool for measuring psychosocial hazards in the workplace and assessing which hazards are associated with symptom experience. The COPSOQ website has a wealth of materials however, they are aimed at researchers and work organization practitioners. We have included a worker friendly version of the COPSOQ materials in this tool kit. The COPSOQ website provides Danish general population survey results which allow for workplace comparisons.

<http://www.arbejdsmiljoforskning.dk/en/publikationer/spoergeskemaer/psykisk-arbejdsmiljoe>

SOBANE tools (Belgian):

Another very useful place to start is with the SOBANE guide to psychosocial hazards (Malchaire, Piette, D'Horre, & Stordeur, 2008).

http://www.deparisnet.be/PSY/Eng/Sobane_guide_psychosocial_aspects.pdf

This 35 page document begins with a detailed description of the SOBANE strategy of hazard assessment (3 pages) and then describes the technique for assessing psychosocial hazards at the screening level (called Déparis – a French acronym for the participatory screening of workplace risks). This is followed by the 10 page workbook for the screening of all workplace hazards (not just psychosocial – Déparis is intended to be an all inclusive hazard assessment process covering 18 hazard categories from the basic layout of the work stations to the psychosocial environment). The last third of the document is devoted to checklist for the Observation stage specifically dealing with 5 general categories of psychosocial hazards, which are broken down into a total of 28 specific aspects.

The French version (original) also has an additional 70 pages of background information sheets dedicated to specific topics to support activities at the Observation and Analysis levels.

<http://www.sobane.be/sobane/publicationDefault.aspx?id=19238>

One needs to take into account the problems associated with the quality of the English translation – there are numerous awkward translations some of which are difficult to understand without referring back to the original French version.

We have also kept in mind the stages of assessment and intervention in the workplace. Using the stages described by the acronym SOBANE (Screening, OBServation, ANalysis, and Expertise), where:

By **S**creening we mean, the shop floor level where workers identify hazards based on their extensive day-to-day knowledge of the work process and conditions. Based on their first-hand knowledge, they also will have valuable contribution to make in coming up with ideas on how to eliminate or control exposure to hazards.

By **O**bservation we mean, the Health and Safety (H&S) Representatives and others within the work organization who have had some training in recognizing workplace hazards by observation (including using checklists, simple measurements, noticing exposure effects or other qualitative ways of measuring hazard exposures).

By **A**nalysis we mean, the quantitative measurement of hazards by persons trained in the skills and the equipment used to measure exposures and specify controls (e.g. occupational hygienists, ergonomists, safety professionals and work organizational specialists).

By **E**xpertise we usually mean, consultants (or in-house experts) who have special skills to deal with technical problems which those in the analysis stage were unable to resolve.

The main concept behind SOBANE stages is that in the ideal situation, health and safety concerns are raised and resolved at the first stages (Screening) and that the subsequent stages are focused on supporting the efforts of the shop floor in dealing with the identified hazards. Thus limited resources are not wasted on expensive efforts to quantify exposures with extreme precision, rather, hazards are pragmatically recognized and the limited resources are devoted to control interventions. For those with a deeper interest in SOBANE, the following link provides a more in depth discussion of the strategy and philosophy:

[http://www.deparisnet.be/sobane/en/SOBANE/Malchaire SOBANE Deparis Eng 17-10-10.pdf](http://www.deparisnet.be/sobane/en/SOBANE/Malchaire_SOBANE_Deparis_Eng_17-10-10.pdf)

Applying the SOBANE concepts to psychosocial hazards, workers' perceptions of psychosocial hazards are the "gold standard" of determining whether a particular risk factor is present in the workplace. By eliciting their perceptions one can identify the factors associated with mental and physical distress. If there is some confusion in the interpretation of these perceptions, structured checklists or simple surveys can be used to aid in collecting and understanding worker experience. Work organization specialists can also assist with standardized techniques of psychosocial hazard assessment and recommend interventions to reduce the impact of the psychosocial hazards identified as being present in the workplace. Extreme events or workplace conditions may warrant the intervention of experts to deal with complicated or extreme psychosocial problems (e.g. grief counseling after a traumatic event).

Lastly, given that the European Union (EU) requires employers to assess psychosocial hazards in the workplace, the number of resources available in Europe are far more numerous and diverse than in North America. Thus, many of the resources listed will be of European origin and thus may refer to a different legal context than Ontario. Readers need to take these differences into

consideration when reviewing these materials, particularly when reading references to (EU) legislation.

HSE (UK) Management Standards for Work Related Stress:

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) is United Kingdom's governmental body which looks after health and safety in Great Britain. In order to comply with the EU's requirement to address psychosocial hazards in the workplace, the HSE conducted research to establish a workplace stress criteria standard called the Management Standards for work-related stress (Health and Safety Executive, 2012). (<http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards/>).

It consists of 6 factors (job demands, job control, support, work relationships, role clarity and workplace change). The HSE developed a 35 item questionnaire called the Indicator Tool: (<http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards/downloads.htm>) to assess workers' experience with these risk factors. They also provide an Excel spreadsheet which allows the workplace itself to enter the results. Furthermore, the spreadsheet analyzes the results and compares them to data collected from a large number of British workplaces. There is also a manual provided with appropriate instruction and help in interpretation.

Guarding Minds @ Work:

The Guarding Minds @ Work (<http://www.guardingmindsatwork.ca/>) is a resource developed by a Simon Fraser University research group, the Centre for Applied Research in Mental Health and Addiction (CARMHA). It was commissioned by the Great-West Life Centre for Mental Health in the Workplace and funded by the Great-West Life Assurance company. The resource was developed to enhance the psychological health of workers across Canada and provide tools for employers to facilitate action to improve the psychological health of their workforce and to evaluate the effectiveness of their efforts.

The resource has a brief (6 question) screening questionnaire (called an initial scan), a more in depth 68 question employee survey (called the GM@W survey) and a self-assessment (called the organizational review) covering 13 psychosocial risk factors (Guarding Minds at Work, 2012). In order to use the GM@W survey, users register to receive a link to send to workers within an organization or work unit. When the survey is closed the results are automatically scored in comparison with a sample of nearly 5000 working Canadians, then a feedback report is automatically sent to the person who initiated the survey. If the user of GM@W agrees, the aggregate data from the survey is made available to the researchers. No mental health or individual identifying information is collected. Based on this report, users have access to a set of possible actions and an implementation and evaluation strategy. All GM@W resources are available at no cost. The orientation of the material in GM@W leans more towards a psychological rather than a sociological perspective.

The International Labour Organization (ILO):

The International Labour Organization (ILO) has put a document online titled *Stress Prevention at Work Checkpoints: Practical improvements for stress prevention in the workplace* (International Labour Office, 2012).

(http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_168053.pdf)

The introduction to the document includes a description of its purpose, “this manual therefore aims at reviewing workplace stress issues. It includes easy-to-apply checkpoints for identifying stressors in working life and mitigating their harmful effects. It is hoped that workers and employers will be able to use the checkpoints to detect causes of stress at work and take effective measures to address them” (International Labour Office, p. v). The resource is broken down into short topics (checkpoints), which describe why an issue should be addressed, and provide ideas on how it can be addressed, illustrated with examples. It is a very easy to read resource book – if you only want to address a particular issue you can look it up in the index and deal with it directly without having to read everything else up to that point in the book.

Mental Health Works (CMHA):

“Mental Health Works is a nationally available program of the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) that builds capacity within Canadian workplaces to effectively address the many issues related to mental health in the workplace” (Mental Health Works, 2012, para. 1).

(<http://www.mentalhealthworks.ca/>).

One of the online tools available from the CMHA is called Workplace Mental Health Promotion: A How-To Guide (<http://wmhp.cmhaontario.ca/>). This site is connected with the Guarding Minds @ Work site and, as would be expected, is also fundamentally based on a tertiary and secondary prevention perspective. The How-To Guide is quite in depth but is nicely divided by topics. It also has a comprehensive page of references to other tools (<http://wmhp.cmhaontario.ca/tools>).

Other Resources

Workers Health and Safety Centre (WHSC)

The Workers Health and Safety Centre (www.whsc.on.ca) is the number 1 health and safety training centre for workers in Ontario. Whether it is a fact sheet or a training program on workplace stress, the WHSC can help. Link to their stress factsheet here: http://www.whsc.on.ca/pubs/res_lines2.cfm?resID=41. The WHSC provides any type of health and safety training that a worker would need in Ontario.

Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers (OHCOW)

Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers (OHCOW) (www.ohcow.on.ca) is a unique organization funded by Ontario that helps workers, joint health and safety committees, unions, employers, medical professionals, community groups, legal clinics, students, and members of the public. Staffed by an inter-disciplinary team of nurses, hygienists, ergonomists, researchers, client service coordinators, and contracted physicians, each OHCOW clinic provides comprehensive occupational health services and information in five areas:

- An inquiry service to answer work-related health and safety questions

- Medical diagnostic services for workers who may have work-related health problems
- Group service for workplace health and safety committees and groups of workers
- Outreach and education to increase awareness of health and safety issues, and promote prevention strategies
- Research services to investigate and report on illnesses and injuries

Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety (CCOHS)

The Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety (CCOHS) (www.ccohs.ca) provides useful health and safety resources for Canadian workplaces. Along with downloadable resources, they provide an inquiry service where people can ask questions about occupational health and safety and get an answer by email.

CCOHS has a “Workplace Stress” factsheet available at:

<http://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/psychosocial/stress.html>

CCOHS also has a Workplace Health and Wellness Guide available at:

<http://www.ccohs.ca/products/publications/wellness.html>